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ABSTRACT

This report presents an analysis of Ohio's early operational experience in implementing the Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) program, a statewide initiative that requires pregnant and parenting teenagers on welfare who lack a high school diploma or its equivalent to go to school. There is a reduction in the family's welfare grant if the teenager does not meet this school attendance requirement and a bonus if she does. This analysis focuses on the first year and a half of program operations in 12 counties in Ohio. Chapter 1 provides background information, a description of the development of the LEAP model, and an overview of LEAP's implementation. Chapter 2 looks at issues related to the way in which county human services agencies have assigned LEAP program functions to their staff and defined the responsibilities of those staff. Chapter 3 addresses issues that have arisen as LEAP staff have worked to identify teenagers who are eligible for the program. The linkages between schools and human services agencies necessary to operate LEAP are the focus of Chapter 4. LEAP's financial incentive system, paying bonuses and enforcing sanctions, is covered in Chapter 5. The last chapter addresses child care. In many cases, effective and ineffective strategies are highlighted. References and a list of selected related publications are included. (LLL)

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Implementing a Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents

Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting Program

Dan Bloom
Hilary Kopp
David Long
Denise Polit

July 1991

Manpower Demonstration
Research Corporation

MDRC

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LEAP

IMPLEMENTING A WELFARE INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AMONG TEENAGE PARENTS

Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting Program

Dan Bloom
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David Long
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The Authors

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PREFACE

This is the first report on MDRC's evaluation of Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) program, a study funded by the Ohio Department of Human Services and the Ford Foundation. LEAP is a statewide initiative that requires all pregnant and parenting teenagers who are on welfare and do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent to attend school regularly. The program includes an unusual system of financial incentives, plus child care assistance and case management, to encourage and assist the teenagers in meeting the school attendance mandate.

This report, which examines early program operations in 12 Ohio counties, is being issued at an opportune time. Until recently, programs for teenage parents were typically small-scale, voluntary initiatives developed outside the welfare system. However, spurred by the Family Support Act – the welfare reform legislation enacted by Congress in 1988 – many state welfare agencies are now actively searching for program approaches to serving teenage parents on welfare. Policy interest in these young people derives in part from research showing that young, unmarried parents are the group most likely to remain on welfare a long time. Their tendency to drop out of school reduces their prospects for self-sufficiency. Because Ohio was one of the first states to develop a large-scale, mandatory program for this population, its experience may provide guidance to other states working to translate the vision of the Family Support Act into concrete programs and policies.

Implementing a program like LEAP is complex, requiring new institutional relationships between welfare and education agencies as well as strong linkages within welfare departments. Given these challenges and LEAP's tight implementation schedule, the progress that has already been made in putting the program in place is impressive. As detailed in the report, LEAP has operated smoothly, on a large scale, with continued public support. Problems persist, but most appear to be solvable. Moreover, several counties have extended the basic LEAP model to provide more services to eligible teens, potentially enhancing the impact of the program and certainly increasing what the evaluation can learn from it. Future reports will assess whether this success in implementation translates into success in meeting LEAP's larger goals: promoting school attendance, educational attainment, and, eventually, economic self-sufficiency.

Judith M. Gueron
President

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) program was designed to address several critical, interrelated problems: teenage childbearing, high dropout rates, youth unemployment, and long-term welfare receipt. The program requires teenage parents and pregnant teenagers who are receiving welfare and who have not completed their high school education – a group that has been shown to be at high risk of long-term reliance on welfare – to attend school on a regular basis. Teens' welfare grants are reduced if they fail to do this and are supplemented if they do. By improving teens' school attendance, it is hoped that LEAP will increase their likelihood of completing school and achieving economic self-sufficiency. LEAP relies on the education system to provide the necessary education and school-based services as well as the data on student attendance that trigger the welfare grant reductions and bonuses.

Teen parents on welfare constitute one of the groups specifically targeted by the Family Support Act of 1988 (FSA), the federal legislation that provides funding for state initiatives designed to move people from welfare to employment. The act encourages states to require teen parents to attend school – or another activity if the teen is beyond the age for compulsory school attendance – and allows them to reduce the welfare grants of teens who do not comply. Few programs for teenagers have imposed financial penalties for failure to participate in required activities, and LEAP, which was designed before the Family Support Act was passed, is the first major program to offer rewards as well as penalties (indeed, Ohio had to get permission from the federal government to provide bonus payments). Because Ohio is one of the first states to launch an initiative of this kind, and because the program is operating under a variety of conditions and is being rigorously evaluated, the LEAP experience can be instructive to other states working to translate the vision of the Family Support Act into operating programs.

This report, the first prepared by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) as part of its evaluation of LEAP, focuses on the first year and a half of program operations in 12 Ohio counties. The research counties, which were chosen by a weighted random selection procedure, include seven of the state's eight largest cities as well as many towns and rural areas; they contain about two-thirds of the statewide teen population targeted by LEAP. The analysis presented in this report relies on field research, supplemented by data collected from county human service agencies and from a survey of LEAP teens. Future reports will assess LEAP's later operations as well as its effectiveness in increasing teens' school attendance and completion, improving their employment experience, reducing their reliance on public assistance, and achieving other outcomes.

The LEAP Model

LEAP, which was developed by the Ohio Department of Human Services (ODHS), is targeted to all pregnant teenagers and teenage custodial parents (all but a few of them women) who are receiving welfare and do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. This group includes teens who head welfare cases as well as those who receive assistance on someone else's case (usually the teen's mother). The program originally served teens through age 18, but it was later expanded to serve 19-year-olds. The LEAP model includes a complex set of financial incentives, as well as child care and transportation support, to encourage and assist teens to attend school regularly. Schools report attendance monthly to program staff.

An eligible teen is required to start LEAP (that is, to attend an assessment and orientation) when she is notified to do so. Then the teen, or the head of her welfare case, receives a bonus of $62 for being enrolled or enrolling in a school or program leading to a high school diploma or its equivalent. She also receives a $62 bonus for each month in which she meets LEAP's monthly attendance requirement (in a regular high school, she must have four or fewer total absences, no more than two of which can be unexcused). For failing to attend an initial assessment, and for each month in which she is not enrolled or has poor attendance (more than two unexcused absences, in the case of a regular high school), the welfare grant for the teen's household is reduced by $62. There is no change in a grant if a teen fails to meet the attendance requirements for a bonus but also has fewer unexcused absences than necessary for a sanction. Teens have several opportunities to provide evidence of "good cause" for absences that schools define as unexcused, and they may be temporarily exempted from the LEAP requirements if they are caring for a young infant, are pregnant, lack suitable child care, or for other reasons.

For a teenager who heads her own welfare case and has one child, a $62 bonus raises her monthly grant from $274 to $336. A sanction reduces it to $212. Thus, a teen who regularly attends school receives $124 more than a teen who is absent from school without an acceptable reason.

Responsibility for implementing the LEAP model belongs to the human services agencies in Ohio's 88 counties. They began contacting teens under age 19 during the summer before the 1989-90 school year, a short time after first being informed of the program by state administrators. Counties faced a wide range of complex institutional and procedural tasks, many of them unprecedented, during the first school year in which LEAP operated. The extension of eligibility for LEAP to 19-year-olds in the summer of 1990 substantially increased the population affected by the program. State administrators recognized the pressure these factors placed on counties but decided that implementation would be facilitated more by accumulating program experience than by allowing a longer period for planning. This strategy assumed that initial operations would uncover problems that could then be solved. The findings presented in this report should be interpreted with this in mind.

Operational Objectives

LEAP seeks to establish an incentive structure that encourages school attendance. It is still too early to determine whether the program has the intended effect on attendance, let alone impacts on the teens' longer-term welfare and employment behavior. At this time, only Ohio's early experience in implementing the LEAP model can be assessed, using mostly qualitative data. In order for LEAP to eventually operate as planned, and ultimately to achieve its long-term goals, counties need to meet several objectives, which fall under the following five headings:

- **Internal structure and staffing.** County human services agencies need to develop the internal capacity to communicate the program's requirements and incentives to teens, carry them out, and provide case management. This entails making a number of decisions about staff assignments and responsibilities, and creating procedures to ensure that these arrangements work.

- **Teen identification.** County agencies have to be able to identify teenagers who are eligible for the program before they can expose them to LEAP's financial incentives and support services.

- **Linkages between schools and human services agencies.** Schools and other education programs must promptly provide county agencies with the attendance data necessary to determine whether a teen has qualified for a bonus or a grant reduction.

- **Bonuses and sanctions.** County departments have to carry out the bonuses and sanctions accurately and on a timely basis, determining who is exempt from the school attendance requirement at any given time, obtaining attendance data, identifying which absences are excused, and giving teens chances to question grant adjustments before they are made.

- **Child care.** The LEAP model calls for teens to receive the child care assistance they need to attend school regularly. County agencies must assist teens in finding care and pay for the care if it meets state regulatory requirements.

It should not be expected that all these objectives will be fully met in all counties this soon after the program has started. They do, however, provide a framework for this analysis. The objectives form benchmarks against which to assess early program progress in each of these areas. This assessment, in turn, helps identify key issues and obstacles to which priority attention should be given by state and county officials in coming months. By comparing the ways these objectives have been addressed in different counties, and the progress each has made, policy lessons may emerge that will help officials address these issues and problems. In addition, identifying where counties have gone beyond these objectives – by providing more services or collaborating with school staff in matters other than attendance reporting – may provide guidance to policymakers regarding the future evolution of the LEAP model and the potential of the Family Support Act to serve teenage parents on welfare.

Findings

- **LEAP is operating as planned in a few counties; it is functioning relatively smoothly, but with limitations and problems, in the others. In view of how challenging the implementation of LEAP was expected to be, and how early this assessment of the program's operations is being made, this is a notable achievement.**

Counties have made substantial progress toward fully implementing the financial incentive structure called for by the LEAP model. Virtually all counties have experienced problems with at least some aspects of implementing this structure. This is understandable in view of the complexity of the procedures – there are numerous steps, many of which have no precedent in Ohio or elsewhere. Most counties have attempted to go beyond establishing the incentive system by providing case management services that address a broader range of issues. A few counties have offered intensive, proactive case management and services such as parenting skills training. In addition, several counties have developed relationships with school staff that permit sharing of information on teens' progress beyond their attendance in school. In these counties, school and county staff have also made joint efforts to facilitate attendance.

Internal Structure and Staffing

- **Because it entails functions that normally belong to different units within county human services agencies, LEAP obliges agencies to assign all functions to one unit or to synchronize the efforts of more than one unit. Depending on the arrangement used, agencies have faced different types of operational challenges and problems.**

LEAP combines grant adjustment and other functions that are traditionally handled by separate divisions of county departments of human services. Counties have devised different approaches to assigning and coordinating these functions. In the few counties that have assigned all LEAP functions to income maintenance workers (who are responsible for welfare eligibility determination and grant calculations), LEAP staff have implemented the grant increases and reductions relatively easily. However, providing case management has been new to these workers. One county in which LEAP staff are income maintenance workers has responded to this potential weakness by providing extensive staff training and supervision.

Other counties divided the key functions, assigning responsibility for grant changes to income maintenance staff and case management to staff more accustomed to providing social services, counseling, or monitoring. Case management has been easier for these counties, since staff are better prepared to handle it. However, several of these counties have encountered problems carrying out grant increases and sanctions, usually because it has been difficult to devise procedures to allow case management staff to ensure that income maintenance staff make grant adjustments as requested. Most counties have attempted to reduce these problems by installing strong oversight measures or developing new intra-agency communication procedures. One such approach involves creating teams of income maintenance and LEAP staff assigned to groups of LEAP cases.

- **Counties have latitude in their use of case management, and several have attempted to provide assistance to teenagers beyond what is needed to carry out bonuses and sanctions.**

LEAP rules require that county human services departments assign each teen a case manager, but the rules allow departments much discretion in defining the job. In some counties, the position has been largely administrative; it has been dedicated to carrying out the incentive structure – that is, taking the steps necessary to make appropriate grant changes – and to referring teens for child care assistance. This approach to case management complies with the LEAP guidelines and clearly appears to be achievable within the program budget constraints that counties face.

In other counties, case managers have been proactive in addressing the barriers that teens face in attending school regularly. Staff have undertaken outreach activities with noncompliant teens, conducted home visits, performed in-depth assessments, offered counseling, and actively worked with support service providers to ensure that teens obtain the assistance they may need. Intensive case management of this kind was provided in several counties at the outset of the program. However, LEAP caseloads have risen since eligibility for the program was extended to 19-year-olds during the summer of 1990. This increase in the caseload has made it more difficult for counties to provide intensive case management.

Identifying Eligible Teens

- **Although LEAP was designed as a universal program, some eligible teens have not been reached. Identifying teens who are eligible for the LEAP program, particularly those who do not head welfare cases, has been more difficult than expected.**

Income maintenance workers are responsible for reviewing welfare cases to locate LEAP-eligible teens. This task is one small aspect of handling welfare eligibility determination and grant payments for large caseloads of recipients. In some counties, these workers have missed a substantial proportion of eligible teens, especially teenagers who do not head welfare cases (for example, a teen parent who lives in a household with both her mother and her child). Since welfare eligibility determination focuses on the case head, and currently is a largely manual process, these problems have proven difficult to overcome. However, several counties have attempted to use other means of identifying additional eligible teens, such as reviewing lists of clients in health programs serving the same population.

Comparing actual LEAP enrollment data against rough estimates of the eligible teen population suggests that, in some counties, the program has successfully reached most eligible teens. However, in a few counties as many as half of the teenagers who have been eligible for LEAP at least part of the time between the program's inception and January 1991 have neither started LEAP nor been sanctioned for failing to start. It appears that most of these teens were never identified as eligible for the program. Others, who were identified by income maintenance workers, were never referred to LEAP or were not sanctioned by LEAP for failing to start the program before reaching the age at which they were no longer required to participate. However, the teen identification difficulties may be reduced as Ohio implements a new, statewide management information system that will automatically identify eligible teens as long as staff enter the pertinent case information (most important, information on relationships among case members).

- **Despite these difficulties, LEAP is operating on a large scale and working with large numbers of school dropouts.**

Even though some counties have encountered problems identifying eligible teenagers – especially during the first few months of program operations – well over 7,000 teens completed at least a preliminary LEAP eligibility review by the end of 1990 in the 12 counties included in this analysis. A large proportion of these teens started the program. While a majority of teens headed their own welfare cases (including virtually all 19-year-olds), more than 40 percent of them (including most of those under age 17) started LEAP as a dependent on someone else's case. The vast majority of these teens have never been married, and about one in seven had more than one child when they started the LEAP program. Most important, half of these teens were not enrolled in school when they started and, on average, a year and a half had passed since these teens were last in school. Thus, a major challenge facing the LEAP program is finding suitable education programs for long-term school dropouts.

Linkages Between Schools and Human Services Agencies

- **LEAP and local school staff have made substantial progress in developing the linkages needed to transmit school attendance information to county human services agencies. However, reporting procedures are still not operating smoothly in some school districts, particularly in large cities where the LEAP caseload is most heavily concentrated.**

In most cases, staff in schools and other education programs have been supportive of the LEAP program and have been willing to provide the necessary attendance data. However, developing reporting procedures has been difficult, especially given the demanding implementation timetable for LEAP and the limited history of institutional collaboration between these agencies. At this point, some county human services agencies are able to obtain attendance information with relatively few problems, while others are not.

Problems are particularly common in large cities, where LEAP teens are dispersed among dozens of schools and programs, each with its own type of attendance records. In addition, many schools have limited administrative resources to devote to LEAP reporting, which is seldom seen as a high-priority task. Finally, many schools and programs do not maintain the type of information required by LEAP. This is especially likely to be true of adult education programs, which traditionally have not needed to distinguish between excused and unexcused absences – a distinction critical to the LEAP attendance standards.

In some school districts, LEAP and school staff have attempted to develop centralized arrangements, where data from a number of schools or programs are reported to LEAP from one district-level source. These arrangements have been effective in some cases, but they have not been used in Ohio's three largest cities – Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati. In these cities, county agencies have directed each LEAP case manager to develop and maintain linkages with a specific set of education providers.

- **In many areas, LEAP teens have a choice of education options. However, alternatives to traditional high school are not always available. Also, school policies designed to promote high school attendance have sometimes limited teens' access to alternative education programs.**

Since LEAP does not provide education services directly, the program's ultimate success depends on schools and other education programs in Ohio. Most LEAP teens attend traditional high schools, alternative programs leading to a high school diploma, or Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs that include preparation for the General Educational Development (GED) test. Public school districts are the key providers of all three types of programs, although ABE programs are also operated by a variety of other agencies. The availability of alternatives to traditional high school appears to be critical, especially for dropouts who are reluctant to return to the same schools in which they have previously failed. However, these options are in scarce supply in some districts, particularly in smaller cities or rural areas.

In addition, even where these programs are available, school policies may have the unintended consequence of limiting teens' ability to access them. For example, because compulsory school attendance rules extend to age 18 in Ohio, many school districts do not permit younger teens to enter adult education programs.

- **In a number of schools and school districts, LEAP and school staff have gone beyond the basic linkages required for attendance reporting to address a wider set of issues. These broader relationships have often involved teachers in the GRADS program, an initiative for pregnant and parenting teens that operates in many Ohio high schools.**

The Graduation, Reality and Dual-Role Skills (GRADS) program is an Ohio Department of Education initiative that funds and trains home economics teachers to provide instruction and facilitate services to pregnant and parenting teenagers in more than 500 Ohio public high schools, junior high schools, and vocational schools. Because GRADS and LEAP share the objective of encouraging young parents to finish high school and serve many of the same teenagers, staff in the two programs have developed close working relationships in some schools. In many cases, GRADS teachers have voluntarily taken on the role of informal liaison between their school and the LEAP program. These linkages allow GRADS teachers and LEAP case managers to develop collaborative strategies to assist specific teens, and also help LEAP staff learn more about teens' performance in school. GRADS has played a vital role in the implementation of LEAP in many of the schools and districts in which it is available.

In a few counties, human services departments and school districts have developed more formal relationships, some of which involve contracts supported by LEAP funding. In one city, LEAP case managers have been stationed in public high schools; in another, LEAP pays the salary of a school district official who serves as a liaison to LEAP, collects all attendance information for district programs, and performs educational assessments for returning dropouts. In one rural county, LEAP has contracted with the local GRADS program to provide case management functions.

Financial Rewards and Penalties

Preliminary evidence is available on counties' implementation of the LEAP financial incentive system. The first category of data addresses the frequency with which welfare grant adjustments are *requested* by LEAP staff – that is, cases in which program case managers have determined that the criteria have been met either for a bonus, which supplements the welfare grant, or for a sanction, which reduces the grant. These data, obtained from a subset of the research counties, reflect requested adjustments in the January 1991 Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) checks of teens known to be eligible for the program at that time. The second type of information, concerning the *execution* of these requests, is based largely on estimates by LEAP staff of the frequency with which requested bonuses and sanctions have been carried out (by income maintenance staff, in most counties) during the last three months of 1990.

- **LEAP case managers have requested bonuses for large numbers of teens, but the proportion appears to vary substantially across counties.**

Bonuses are requested routinely when teens' compliance with the program's attendance standards can be verified. However, program rules also require counties to pay bonuses to teens who are enrolled in school but for whom attendance information cannot be obtained. Thus, some bonuses are paid to teens who do not actually meet the attendance requirements. There appears to be variation in the extent to which counties pursue missing information, and in whether they pay these presumptive bonuses. This may partly account for the substantial variation in bonus requests across counties, ranging from less than one-sixth to more than one-third of teens identified as eligible for LEAP.

- **In a sampling of counties, the total number of sanction requests has been similar to total bonus requests. The proportion of LEAP teens for whom grant reductions have been requested is large compared to other mandatory-participation programs for welfare recipients.**

Five of the 12 research counties – including the three largest – were asked for information on sanction and bonus requests. All but one of them requested sanctions that would reduce the January 1991 AFDC checks of at least one-fifth of identified teens. In one county, the fraction was close to one-third. Most of these sanctions were for failure to start the program (that is, to appear for the initial assessment) or failure to enroll in school. A smaller number were for excessive unexcused absences by teens already enrolled in school.

These sanction-request rates are substantially higher than those typically found in evaluations of welfare-to-work programs for adults. However, this is not surprising. Compared to most other programs that have been evaluated, LEAP requires individuals to do more, and the daily monitoring of school attendance that triggers sanctions in LEAP is more exacting. Most important, since financial rewards and penalties are the heart of the LEAP model and their application is clearly specified in the program's rules, staff have relatively little discretion in responding to noncompliance.

- **Counties have made impressive progress toward implementing LEAP's system of financial rewards and penalties. However, in several counties, administrative problems have impeded the processing of requests for bonuses and sanctions, and timely adjustments have often failed to occur.**

As noted above, counties have varied in terms of the effectiveness of their intra-organizational linkages within the county human services agency. As a result, grant adjustments requested by LEAP staff have not always been processed in a timely manner by income maintenance staff. This problem is typically more acute with regard to sanctions than bonuses. In some counties, staff report that as many as half the requested sanctions do not occur on time. LEAP staff have devoted considerable time and energy to improving this situation, and some progress appears to have been made, especially in counties that have developed special organizational strategies to link the case management and grant adjustment functions.

- **Unresolved issues regarding the automated statewide welfare information system have frequently hindered implementation of the LEAP incentive system.**

In an effort to remove some of the administrative burden from county staff, ODHS created a centralized data system for LEAP, using the existing statewide welfare computer system. Under this arrangement, an attendance reporting form for each LEAP teen in Ohio is generated and mailed to schools from Columbus each month. However, particularly during the first year of operations, this system seldom operated as intended. ·Difficulties appear to have been caused by a combination of computer problems and incorrect use of the system by county staff. This meant that schools often did not receive information on LEAP enrollees on schedule and could not provide timely information to LEAP staff. Thus, sanctions and bonuses could not be delivered on the proper schedule, even when internal human services procedures operated smoothly. ODHS has taken several steps to improve this system, but problems appear to have persisted into the second school year of LEAP operations.

- **The relatively long lag between school attendance (or lack of it) and financial rewards or penalties, partly resulting from LEAP's careful due process procedures, may weaken the program's effect on the teens' behavior. However, these procedures may have helped avoid numerous hearings and legal challenges.**

LEAP sanctions and bonuses are supposed to occur three months after the behavior that triggers them (for example, poor attendance in September leads to sanction in December), in part because the program provides teens with several opportunities to respond to notices of impending sanctions before their grants are reduced. Some have argued that this long lag causes confusion and weakens the incentives. However, it is likely that the notification and response procedures have contributed to LEAP's relatively positive public image, and to the fact that LEAP has experienced far fewer legal problems than has the Learnfare program in Wisconsin, which also requires school attendance by teenagers on welfare but includes only sanctions, not bonuses.

- **The number of teens exempted from LEAP requirements appears to be relatively small despite the multiple problems facing many teenage parents. When exemptions have been granted, they have typically not been caused by the program's inability to provide needed support services.**

Eligible teens may be temporarily exempted from the LEAP mandate for a number of reasons, including unavailability of suitable child care or transportation, or illnesses affecting teens or their children. In addition, teens may choose not to participate if they are caring for a child under three months old or are in the last seven months of a pregnancy. LEAP staff in nearly all of the research counties report that most exemptions are granted to teens for the latter two reasons, which largely reflect state policy rather than the availability of support services or teens' barriers to school attendance. This suggests that the application of a school attendance mandate appears feasible for the majority of teen parents.

The mandatory status of pregnant teens has been the subject of intense debate in Ohio, especially since repeat pregnancies among LEAP teens appear to be common. A policy change after the first year of operations (made to bring Ohio into compliance with federal law) exempted pregnant teens from the LEAP mandate for most of their pregnancy. This policy is generally unpopular with LEAP and school staff, and they report that it has increased the number of exemptions.

Child Care

- **Few LEAP teens have availed themselves of program-funded child care, primarily because many teens prefer informal care provided by relatives and Ohio rules prohibit payment to unlicensed child care providers. In part because demand for LEAP-funded child care has been low, only a few areas have experienced shortages of child care slots.**

Partial results from an MDRC survey of teenagers in LEAP indicate that only about 14 percent of the teens who reported being enrolled in school said they were using a child care arrangement funded by the welfare department. This rate is lower than state planners anticipated, especially since nearly all LEAP teens have preschool-age children.

Low utilization rates appear to result from a combination of factors. On the demand side, LEAP staff report that, when they discuss child care options with teen parents, many teens are not willing to entrust the care of their children to formal day care providers. For a number of reasons, most of these teens prefer to rely on relatives. This fact, when combined with Ohio rules that allow public funds to be used only for licensed or certified child care providers, greatly reduces the likelihood that program-funded care will be used.

In terms of the supply of child care slots, most counties report that existing networks of contracted providers have thus far been sufficient to meet the limited demand for funded care. However, shortages have been reported in some areas, particularly for infant care slots. In addition, available slots may not be located near a teen's home or school, making them considerably less attractive to teens.

It is too early to determine whether low utilization of program-funded child care is affecting teens' ability to comply with the LEAP attendance mandate. School staff often report that "child care problems" are a key reason for school absences (usually excused) by teenage parents, and teens' responses to MDRC's survey are consistent with this view. At the same time, few teens have expressed an interest in program-funded child care, and few exemptions have been granted for lack of child care.

Conclusions

It should be underscored that the findings of this report focus on the early implementation of LEAP. They necessarily address the question "Has the LEAP model been implemented as intended?" rather than "Is this model effective?" This and other open questions remain for future reports.

These findings suggest that Ohio has made major advances toward operating LEAP as planned, but also that it still has issues to resolve. Given how challenging the implementation of this initiative is, and how early in the process this assessment of program implementation is being made, the progress that has been made is greater than many knowledgeable observers would have expected. LEAP is operating on a large scale and is instituting its financial incentive system for most of the teen parent population it targets. The program has maintained a positive public image while adjusting family welfare grants for a substantial number of teens.

While problems clearly remain, they do appear to be solvable. Several counties have failed to identify all eligible teens, but the implementation of a new automated information system may reduce these instances. Obtaining the necessary school enrollment and attendance data from schools has often been time-consuming, and sometimes has not been accomplished, but several counties have developed procedures to expedite the process. Many counties have encountered problems carrying out grant increases and sanctions on a timely basis, but they can learn from the counties that handle these actions more smoothly. Child care utilization has been limited by strict state regulations, but Ohio is experimenting with less restrictive rules that would allow teens new child care options.

Moreover, in many instances, counties have gone beyond the minimum actions necessary to administer the financial incentives that are the key feature of the LEAP model. They have conducted more extensive outreach to teens, offered more intensive case management, worked with GRADS teachers to develop joint strategies to assist clients, and offered additional services such as instruction in parenting skills. Some of these activities warrant consideration by policymakers as LEAP continues to evolve, especially since their provision has become more difficult as LEAP caseloads have grown.

The Family Support Act of 1988 encourages all states to require teen parents to attend school and allows them to impose sanctions when they do not comply. When Ohio began operating LEAP in 1989, it was not clear that a state could implement this concept without encountering public resistance, bureaucratic confusion, and legal actions that would make continued operations exceedingly difficult. The early experience in Ohio – which uses financial rewards, case management, and support services in addition to sanctions in implementing LEAP's school attendance requirement – indicates this is indeed a feasible undertaking.

However, both the Congress and the State of Ohio had more in mind than testing the feasibility of an idea. Ultimately, the success of LEAP and initiatives like it depends on their ability to change the behavior of the teenagers they target. It is too early to assess LEAP's effectiveness in increasing school attendance and its longer-term impact on employment, welfare receipt, and other outcomes. These issues will be addressed during the remaining years of this evaluation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABE	Adult Basic Education
AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
AFDC-UP	Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Unemployed Parent
CDHS	county department(s) of human services
CRIS	Client Registry Information System
CRIS-E	Client Registry Information System-Enhanced
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture
FSA	Family Support Act of 1988
GAIN	Greater Avenues for Independence program (California)
GED	General Educational Development (high school equivalency)
GOALS	Graduation, Occupation and Living Skills program
GRADS	Graduation, Reality and Dual-Role Skills program
HHS	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
IM	income maintenance
JOBS	Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training program
JTPA	Job Training Partnership Act (1982)
LEAP	Learning, Earning, and Parenting program
MDRC	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation
MIS	management information system
NDN	National Diffusion Network
ODE	Ohio Department of Education
ODHS	Ohio Department of Human Services
OFA	Office of Family Assistance, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
SDA	service delivery area (in the JTPA system)
SWIM	Saturation Work Initiative Model (San Diego)
SYEP	Summer Youth Employment Program
WAVE	Work, Achievement, Values, and Education program
WIC	Women, Infants, and Children program
WIN	Work Incentive program

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This report presents an analysis of Ohio's early operational experience in implementing the Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) program, a statewide initiative that requires pregnant and parenting teenagers on welfare who lack a high school diploma or its equivalent to go to school. The central feature of LEAP, which was formerly called Project Learn, is financial incentives: There is a reduction in the family's welfare grant if the teen does not meet this school attendance requirement and a bonus if she does. Implementing LEAP has been a major challenge, both because Ohio and other states have had little experience operating programs like this one and because the implementation timetable Ohio set for LEAP has been very tight. Counties in Ohio have made enormous progress in implementing LEAP and, as this report highlights, there are several areas in which further progress could improve the way in which the program presently functions.

This analysis focuses on the first year and a half of program operations in 12 counties in Ohio. It is intended to provide early lessons on selected program operation issues, rather than findings from a full-blown assessment of the operation of a mature program. The analysis is part of a broader, comprehensive evaluation of LEAP being conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) with funding from the Ohio Department of Human Services (ODHS) and the Ford Foundation. Lessons from this analysis may help state and county policymakers in Ohio improve the operation of the program. The findings from this research may also be instructive to policymakers outside Ohio, particularly since the Family Support Act, the federal welfare reform legislation enacted in 1988, calls on states to impose a school attendance mandate on teen parents who receive welfare and have not finished their high school education.

I. Background

A. Teenage Childbearing

Each year in the United States, nearly half a million babies are born to young women who have not yet reached age 20. The number of births to teenagers declined during the early

1980s but, after 1986, it began rising once again. Moreover, the number of births to unwed teenage mothers rose steadily throughout the last decade (Moore, 1990). There is considerable evidence that unwed young mothers typically experience a wide range of economic, social, and personal problems (Hayes, 1987).

Without financial support from husbands, teenage mothers are increasingly relying on public assistance to help raise their children. It has been estimated that the public outlays associated with teenage childbearing in 1989 alone exceeded $21 billion for the three major public assistance programs: Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC),[1] Food Stamps, and Medicaid (Center for Population Options, 1990).

Recent evidence has underscored the public policy importance of teenage childbearing. One analysis has shown that young, never-married women who enter the welfare system when their children are under age three are at especially high risk of being long-term recipients – that is, for nine years or more (Ellwood, 1986). Over one-third of the teenage parents who begin a welfare spell will receive AFDC for 10 or more years (Maxfield and Rucci, 1986). A more recent analysis led researchers to conclude that AFDC receipt around the time an unmarried teenager gives birth may itself be a cause of future dependence and economic hardship, independent of the timing of the birth or the background characteristics of the mother (Duncan and Hoffman, 1990).

Much of the effect of teenage parenthood on long-term welfare dependence is related to truncated educational attainment. Pregnancy is a leading cause of school dropout among teenage girls (Ekstrom et al., 1986). Only 56 percent of women aged 21 to 29 in 1986 who first gave birth at age 17 or younger were high school graduates, compared to 91 percent among those who became mothers between ages 20 and 24 (Upchurch and McCarthy, 1989). Not only do these young mothers lack the educational credentials that are often a minimum requirement for many jobs and for advanced education, but they also have poor basic skills that make it difficult for them to compete in the labor force (Berlin and Sum, 1988). Given the lack of credentials and skills, and the limited employment experience of many of these young women, long-term reliance on public assistance is extremely likely.

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[1] In Ohio, this program is known as ADC. However, this report will use the federal abbreviation, AFDC.

B. Interventions for Teenage Parents

1. Programs of the 1980s. The LEAP program is being implemented at a time when policy interest in strategies to enhance the self-sufficiency of welfare-dependent teenage mothers has burgeoned. Two broad strategies employed during the 1980s are important for understanding LEAP's current policy context: (1) voluntary-participation programs offering a comprehensive array of services designed to meet the special needs of teenage parents, and (2) programs that use financial incentives to encourage welfare recipients (generally women who are beyond the teen years) to participate in activities designed to enhance their earning power.

During the early 1980s, programs serving young parents and pregnant teens proliferated in this country. These programs were developed under many auspices but were especially common in schools, health agencies, and community-based organizations. Welfare agencies, with rare exceptions, did not operate programs designed to address the needs of this population, despite the large numbers of teenage parents on welfare caseloads. Service providers working with teenage parents came increasingly to recognize that teenage parents have multiple needs that cannot be addressed by offering a single type of service such as health care or education. These providers also recognized that teenagers often lack the skills necessary for independently putting together their own "service package," even when all the services they need are available in various local agencies. Thus, comprehensive programs for teenage parents were developed that provided education, health services (such as family planning), life management training (for example, parenting education), employability development, and other social services.

Although the emphasis and philosophies of these voluntary programs varied, virtually all of them shared the goal of improving the educational attainment of teenage parents. In contrast, relatively few had as an explicit objective reducing the welfare dependence of young mothers. Information regarding the effectiveness of these programs is limited, but there is some evidence from a national demonstration program, Project Redirection, that participation in such programs can have beneficial long-term effects on both the employment and welfare receipt of teen parents and on the well-being of their children (Polit, Quint, and Riccio, 1988).

During this same period, initiatives were launched by state welfare agencies to promote the self-sufficiency of adult AFDC recipients using financial incentives to encourage them to participate in employment-focused activities. In such welfare-to-work programs, individuals who failed to comply with program participation requirements were subject to a sanction, which reduced their AFDC grant for a fixed period of time. Teenage parents were not required to participate in most of the programs because the federal legislation that was in place until 1988 (the Work Incentive or WIN program) granted exemptions to women whose children were younger than six. Evaluations of these programs suggested that they had modest but statistically significant effects on earnings and welfare receipt (Gueron and Pauly, 1991). However, the effectiveness of such an approach with young parents cannot be determined from these evaluations.

The late 1980s produced a new generation of interventions for economically disadvantaged teenage parents. Comprehensive programs began increasingly to offer employment-related services to improve teen parents' prospects for eventual self-sufficiency (Polit, 1986) and, at the same time, welfare agencies in several states initiated interventions for teenage parents – after obtaining a waiver of the age-of-youngest-child exemption.[2] While many programs embraced self-sufficiency as an important objective, they have differed dramatically in their approach. It is especially noteworthy that programs differed in terms of their mandatory versus voluntary nature, and their emphasis on services versus financial incentives.

2. Current Interventions. Three large-scale programmatic efforts that vary on these two dimensions were implemented in the late 1980s and are currently ongoing: the Wisconsin Learnfare program, the New Chance Demonstration, and the Teenage Parent Demonstration. These interventions are especially relevant for understanding LEAP's context.

- **Wisconsin Learnfare.** The first large-scale use of financial incentives as a mechanism for promoting the self-sufficiency of teenagers came with the enactment of Wisconsin's Learnfare legislation in 1987. Under that legislation, all AFDC recipients between the ages of 13 and 19 (including those who are not parents) are required to regularly attend school or an alternative program leading to a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) credential in order for their families to continue to qualify for their full AFDC grant. Learnfare's use of financial incentives is limited to these sanctions; it does not provide grant increases for good school attendance. Teens are exempted from the school requirement if they have a child less than three months old or transportation is unavailable.

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[2] These initiatives, operated in several states as WIN Demonstration programs, include the Wisconsin Learnfare program described below.

In Wisconsin's Learnfare, welfare caseworkers review the last semester's school attendance record of each teen case member. If the teen had 10 or more unexcused absences during the semester, he or she is required to meet a monthly attendance requirement that allows no more than two days of unexcused absences per month. All teens who are not enrolled in school (at application or redetermination) must meet the monthly attendance requirement. When teens do not comply with the attendance requirement, their portion of the AFDC grant is removed.[3]

- **New Chance.** New Chance is a demonstration program that was mounted by MDRC in 16 sites around the country in 1989. It offers to 16- to 22-year-old mothers who are on welfare and who have dropped out of school a very rich and intensive set of services. These services include education; employability development and career exposure; work experience and skills training; workshops on family planning, AIDS, and substance abuse prevention; classes on life skills, self-esteem, and parenting; personal and group counseling; health services; and on-site child care in most sites. Participation, which can last up to 18 months, is voluntary.[4] The New Chance model emphasizes services customized for this disadvantaged population, individualized attention, and strong case management, all of which are designed to address the external and internal barriers presumed to interfere with the teens' efforts to achieve self-sufficiency.

- **The Teenage Parent Demonstration.** The Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) funded a demonstration program designed to provide information about the effectiveness of mandatory-participation programs for teenage parents. The Teenage Parent Demonstration began operation in three sites (Camden and Newark, New Jersey, and South Chicago) in 1987. In this demonstration, which focuses on teenage parents as they first begin to receive AFDC, teens are required to participate in one or more of a variety of activities, which

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[3] The Wisconsin Learnfare program has generated considerable controversy. Its proponents believe that it is effective and that it creates appropriate penalties for socially undesirable behavior on the part of teens and failed supervision of that behavior by their parents. Critics have argued that Learnfare is punitive, citing its sanctioning of almost 8 percent of all teens in AFDC families (and, within this group, 14 percent of all teen parents). They also contend that it requires teenagers to remain in school without needed support services, modifications of high school practices, and alternatives to traditional high schools, and that it is prone to inconsistent administration and inadequate administrative review of grievances. The program's procedures have been contested in a large number of fair hearings (before administrative officers), especially in Milwaukee, as well as in court. A Wisconsin Circuit Court dismissed a series of complaints raised by plaintiffs during Learnfare's first year of operation. However, another court recently issued an injunction in response to further complaints raised in Milwaukee County and, as a result, several program changes are now being made. For further information, see Corbett et al., 1989; Jackson, 1989; Pawasarat and Quinn, 1990.

[4] However, participation in New Chance in many cases satisfies the mandatory-participation requirement imposed on welfare recipients by welfare agencies (see the next section on the Family Support Act).

> include job search assistance and vocational training in addition to high school and GED programs. Failure to comply with the mandatory-participation requirement can result in a sanction that removes the teen's portion of the AFDC grant. In New Jersey, Medicaid benefits for the teen parent are also suspended. Unlike Wisconsin's Learnfare, the Teenage Parent Demonstration uses services as well as financial incentives as part of the model. Teenagers participating in the Teenage Parent Demonstration programs receive case management; child care and transportation assistance; workshops on life skills, parenting, and other topics; and job search assistance.

LEAP is most like the Wisconsin Learnfare program, although there are fundamental differences. A senior ODHS administrator who had been a Wisconsin legislator led the effort to establish a similar program in Ohio. Like Learnfare, LEAP is a mandatory program that relies mainly on financial incentives to encourage school attendance and high school completion. Unlike Learnfare, however, LEAP combines financial penalties for non-compliance with financial rewards for compliance. Case management services are also available to all teens in LEAP, but not in Learnfare. These and other differences that are described in this report appear to have led to quite different implementation experiences in the two states.

These current large-scale interventions for disadvantaged teenage parents have considerable overlap in their target populations and in their goals, but there are important differences as well. Together, the research on these programs will provide important information regarding strategies designed to promote the self-sufficiency of teen parents on welfare – information that is quite timely in light of provisions in the Family Support Act.

C. Family Support Act

The enactment of the Family Support Act (FSA) by the U.S. Congress in 1988 reinforced Ohio's decision to develop and implement the LEAP model. ODHS was committed to LEAP prior to the passage of the federal legislation, but the legislation provided new support – both political and financial – for the effort.

The Act establishes the Job Opportunity and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program, which offers new funding and incentives to states to provide education and other services to particular groups within the overall AFDC population. One of its provisions identifies recipients under age 24 who lack a high school diploma as a priority group to serve, and another requires AFDC custodial parents under age 20 who lack a diploma to participate in an educational activity. This requirement can be enforced through the use of sanctions, even for teen parents with young children.[5]

The legislation enhances the potential value of LEAP implementation lessons to other states inasmuch as it contains provisions that encourage states to give special attention to the delivery of education services to young people on their welfare caseloads and to require participation in these activities. As states work to translate the provisions of the Family Support Act into JOBS programs, Ohio's LEAP experience should be instructive.

II. Developing the LEAP Model

Ohio used Wisconsin's Learnfare experience, as well as research findings on other initiatives for teens, in developing the LEAP program model. Discussions were held within ODHS and among members of the Governor's Welfare Reform Advisory Committee, after which ODHS included an initiative called Project Learn (the name was later changed to LEAP) in its budget request for fiscal year 1989. Following legislative approval,[6] ODHS staff in the Office of Welfare Reform and the Public Assistance Division began to develop guidelines for the program. At the same time, ODHS sought waivers from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Family Assistance (OFA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to administer LEAP's financial incentives as planned. These were granted by OFA in 1989 and by FNS in 1990.[7]

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[5] For details of these provisions, see the Family Support Act, 100th Cong., 2d sess., Public Law 100-485; a useful summary of them is provided by Gueron and Pauly, 1991.

[6] The fiscal year 1989 budget bill, enacted by the legislature in 1988, included language (in Section 5101.20 of the Ohio Revised Code) that authorized Project Learn. In 1989, the legislature approved additional program guidelines as well as funding for the first full year of operations. In 1990, Substitute House Bill 210 changed the name of the program to LEAP and codified many of its provisions that had been developed since the passage of the 1989 budget bill.

[7] The waivers of federal rules obtained by ODHS from OFA allowed Ohio to impose sanctions on teenagers and to enforce them on a different basis than that prescribed at the time by the rules for the federal Work Incentive (WIN) program, the predecessor of the JOBS program. Specifically, the waivers allow sanctions to be set at a fixed amount per month ($62) and to be imposed for as little as one month or as long as it takes for a teenager to comply with the program's attendance requirement. (Under WIN, sanctions eliminated the parent's portion of an AFDC grant for three months for the first sanction and six months for the second.) The waiver also permitted bonus payments to be made. The FNS waivers permitted Ohio to leave a family's Food Stamps allotment unchanged when an AFDC grant is increased (federal rules require that Food Stamps be adjusted when there are changes in income, including AFDC). An FNS waiver is not needed to leave the allotment unchanged when an

(continued...)

In developing the LEAP model, ODHS staff wrestled with such issues as the appropriate age at which to cut off program eligibility (it was originally set at age 19 but later changed to age 20), whether to issue bonus payments directly to eligible teens who do not head welfare cases (it was decided that all bonus payments would be issued to case heads), and whether to include measures of student progress among the criteria for earning bonuses (ODHS chose to monitor only attendance).

County departments of human services (CDHS) had limited involvement in these early discussions of the model. However, these departments, which in Ohio's county-administered AFDC system have responsibility for actually implementing LEAP, became actively involved following ODHS' distribution of a LEAP concept paper in February 1989. This paper included a description of the program that, while subsequently more fully specified in the program regulations, nevertheless covered all its key elements. It spelled out a financial incentive system for teenagers who are custodial parents, receive AFDC (either on their own case or on another case), and do not have a high school diploma or GED:[8] Teens who regularly attend a school or program leading to a high school diploma or GED would receive a supplement to their household's AFDC grant; those who do not would be given a grant reduction (additional details are provided below). Teens who attend school would also be eligible to receive assistance with child care and transportation. LEAP was designed to rely almost entirely on these financial incentives and the existing education system to achieve its goal. From the outset, ODHS administrators felt that LEAP should depend on schools rather than offer services directly. They also believed that if school services proved to be inadequate, the education system, not ODHS, should respond to that inadequacy.[9]

After the concept paper was circulated, ODHS solicited comments and suggestions from county staff and others. Many counties responded with specific recommendations for revisions

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[7](...continued)
AFDC grant is reduced owing to a sanction, since this is not considered an income change under federal rules.

[8] In Ohio, individuals who pass the GED test receive an Ohio Certificate of High School Equivalence. For simplicity, this report uses the acronym GED to refer to both the test and the credential.

[9] This belief stemmed from a recognition of the public schools' mandate to serve all eligible students. Specifically, Section 3313.64(B) of the Ohio Revised Code stipulates that all individuals between the ages of 5 and 22 must be admitted to school.

or clarifications of the proposed model. Several changes in the program design were adopted during this period, most notably:

- **Minimum attendance requirement.** The concept paper included no minimum attendance requirement. Thus, any teen who had two or fewer *unexcused* absences in a month would have received a bonus, regardless of how many *excused* absences had been reported. ODHS staff decided to change this policy because teens who attended schools with lenient policies for excusing absences would receive bonuses even when they missed many days of school, which seemed inconsistent with the program's goal of promoting school *attendance*. It would also be impractical for teens' mothers to both receive bonuses and be responsible for writing the notes that would lead to excused absences. To increase the congruence between the program's incentive system and its key objective, and to avoid establishing a perverse incentive for creative "excuses," ODHS decided to institute the minimum attendance requirement.[10] Since the rules for sanctions were not changed, this decision created two different standards, one for earning a bonus and another for avoiding a sanction (and, by extension, a third "no change" situation, for teens whose attendance is sufficient to avoid the sanction but not good enough to earn a bonus).

- **Due process procedures.** Initially, the process for reducing welfare grants in response to noncompliance would have allowed a more limited opportunity for teens (or case heads) to respond after being notified that they had failed to enroll in school or had excessive unexcused absences. The concept paper proposed that teens be given 15 days to request a hearing when this occurred – the normal process for adult case heads in Ohio when a welfare grant reduction is proposed. During the planning period, a seven-day interval was added to allow teens to provide evidence of "good cause" before a sanction could be proposed.

- **Case management provisions.** While it did outline many of the functions that LEAP staff would be required to perform, the initial description did not discuss case management. However, during the spring and summer of 1989, successive versions of the draft regulations made it increasingly clear that ODHS expected this to be part of the program (although the choice of case management methods was left to counties).

ODHS also refined and clarified LEAP rules in other areas and developed procedures allowing counties to use the statewide computer data system for tracking LEAP teens.

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[10] At this same point, ODHS added a provision to the regulations stating that absences caused by an illness affecting the teen or her child (and confirmed by a physician's statement) would be "waived." Thus, teens can still receive bonuses as long as they have two or fewer unexcused absences, and no more than four total absences, *not counting absences excused by a doctor's note.*

Counties became aware of these refinements through a series of draft versions of the program regulations that were circulated in the spring and early summer of 1989. By June, the regulations were close to their final form and county staff were trained on the program.

III. An Overview of LEAP's Implementation

From the county perspective, the planning period preceding the implementation of LEAP was quite brief. Some county staff were aware that the program was being developed, but the first official communication counties received regarding LEAP was the concept paper circulated in February 1989. That paper included a "fast track" implementation schedule that called for intake of teen parents to begin in June, and for the school attendance mandate to take effect on September 1. Thus, counties had only five to six months to conduct pre-operational planning for a challenging new program that had not yet been fully specified (final regulations were released in August). ODHS administrators recognized the pressure this placed on counties, but decided that implementation would be facilitated more by gaining program experience than by allowing a longer period for planning.

A. Implementation Context

Circulation of the LEAP concept paper marked the unofficial beginning of planning and preparations for LEAP at the county level. Several of the key events and milestones in this process are listed in Table 1.1. As this chronology indicates, the implementation schedule for LEAP was compressed. In addition, during this same period, staff in most counties were involved with several other important new projects. These included planning for the JOBS program, which was implemented in Ohio in phases beginning in July 1989;[11] implementing other new services mandated by the Family Support Act, such as transitional Medicaid and

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[11] JOBS was implemented in 41 of Ohio's 88 counties in July 1989, replacing an existing welfare-to-work initiative known as the Ohio Fair Work Program, and will be implemented statewide by 1991. The early-starting counties included 9 of the 12 counties participating in the LEAP evaluation (Franklin, Hamilton, Lawrence, Lucas, Montgomery, Muskingum, Stark, Summit, and Trumbull). Although technically part of Ohio's JOBS program, LEAP is usually perceived as a separate program for teen parents, while JOBS is seen as a program for adults.

TABLE 1.1

KEY EVENTS IN THE LEAP PLANNING PERIOD

1989	
February	Counties receive a concept paper describing the LEAP model and providing early estimates of their caseloads.
	Counties receive grants to support planning activities.
March	County representatives and ODHS staff meet in Columbus for a briefing and discussion about LEAP and the evaluation.
	Superintendents of all school districts in Ohio receive a joint letter from the Director of ODHS and the Superintendent of Public Instruction informing them about LEAP and urging them to cooperate.
April	First-draft program regulations are issued.
	Counties receive initial computer printouts of AFDC cases that potentially include teen parents to assist them in identifying the eligible population.
	Counties receive initial estimates of allocations for administration (which also funds transportation) and child care.
June	ODHS holds training sessions for county LEAP staff.
July	Counties are permitted to begin contacting teens for assessment interviews.
September	School attendance requirement officially takes effect.

SOURCE: MDRC field research and the Ohio Department of Human Services.

child care coverage for people leaving welfare for employment; preparing for implementation of a sophisticated new statewide welfare computer system that requires substantial reorganization within county departments; and operationalizing new regulations requiring General Assistance recipients (mostly single men) to participate in education activities. All of these were large-scale projects that consumed the time and energy of many county staff. Finally, although it was logical to time the start-up of LEAP to coincide with the beginning of a school year, this meant that much of the preparation for LEAP had to be done during the summer, when many school staff were not available to help.

The challenge facing counties was not limited to implementing the state's LEAP model on a tight schedule. First, ODHS did not prescribe any of the non-financial aspects of this model – that is, case management, child care assistance, and transportation help. Instead, ODHS let counties develop these elements to their own liking.

Second, counties have been expected to establish their own interagency links with schools and other education programs, on which LEAP relies to actually deliver the required education and to report on school attendance. During the time ODHS was developing the LEAP program, its administrators met several times with counterparts at the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). While LEAP was regarded as an ODHS program, not a joint venture, ODE administrators offered support and suggestions, and the State Superintendent of Education officially notified school districts about the program. Beyond this, the responsibility for developing working relationships with the education system was left to the county departments of human services.

One factor more than any other – the existence of the Graduation, Reality and Dual-Role Skills (GRADS) program, an ODE program for pregnant and parenting teenagers operated in Ohio's high schools – has facilitated the relationship between the county departments and the schools. GRADS funds teachers in participating high schools to conduct classes on life skills and parenting as well as to provide support to pregnant and parenting teens who are students in the schools. As described later in this report, GRADS teachers have often acted both as liaisons to LEAP and as counselors from whom teens could obtain information about LEAP and LEAP could obtain information about teens.

Given this context, as well as the innovative nature of the LEAP model, it is remarkable that the program did, in fact, begin roughly on schedule in all the research counties.[12] As discussed below, some components of the program lagged, and planning continued well into the period of operations, but considerable progress was made by county and state staff. It is also important to consider this context when appraising the current state of the LEAP program. Although later chapters of this report will describe a number of difficulties and obstacles that counties have encountered, these issues are, in many respects, typical for a new program during its start-up phase.

B. Program Implementation

As noted earlier, county agency staff began to take on the challenge of LEAP during the spring and summer of 1989. Counties had preliminary estimates of the number of eligible cases they would need to serve and the funding they would have to work with, plus increasingly refined versions of draft program regulations from ODHS. However, most county staff did not have directly relevant background,[13] and there was little past experience to learn from. In addition, in most counties, there had been limited previous collaboration between welfare and education agencies. In general, three key issues occupied the time and energy of LEAP planners during this period: (1) establishing linkages with education providers; (2) deciding where to place LEAP within the CDHS, how to staff the program, and how to manage the necessary intra-agency linkages; and (3) identifying the eligible caseload. These issues are examined in other chapters of the report.

Despite making substantial progress during the planning period, most counties were not prepared to implement all aspects of the LEAP program on September 1, 1989, when the attendance mandate officially took effect. Some counties had not completed the process of identifying and interviewing eligible teens in the welfare caseload. Others had not been able to establish procedures for attendance reporting with local schools prior to the beginning of the academic year. Still others experienced hiring problems and were operating the program with temporary staff. In addition, the statewide computerized attendance reporting system, which generates attendance rosters for schools, did not operate as planned in the early months (see Chapter 4). This meant that school attendance information was often not available even in areas where procedures were in place.

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[12] Intake of eligible teens began in July or August in most counties, following approval by the legislature of a $15 million budget for the first year of program operations. This budget included $1.2 million for bonus payments (this amount represents the estimated net cost of grant increases minus grant reductions due to sanctions); $4.4 million for administration, case management, and transportation; and $9.1 million for child care.

[13] Two of the research counties, Lucas and Montgomery, were already operating voluntary programs for teen parents when LEAP was announced. However, these programs did not involve monitoring school attendance.

In some counties, LEAP staff received pressure from school district officials to get the program moving quickly. School funding levels are based on enrollment figures reported on October 15 and, because many district officials anticipated that the LEAP mandate might bring large numbers of dropouts back to school, they wanted to be certain that most of these students were enrolled by that date. Some counties responded with special strategies designed to accelerate the intake process. For example, after getting a late start, Lucas County ran special group orientation sessions during September, bringing in nearly 200 teens in a three-week period, in part because of a school district request.

As might be expected, the process of planning and refining the LEAP program continued well past the official implementation date. In most counties, LEAP program operations steadily improved during the 1989-90 school year. Attendance reporting arrangements gradually fell into place in most areas, and counties experienced fewer problems with the state data system. With the initial backlog of assessments completed (and caseloads remaining at relatively low levels), case managers in many counties were able to provide a substantial amount of personalized service to teens. However, in some counties, start-up problems hindered certain aspects of the program throughout the 1989-90 academic year. Since LEAP is tied so closely to the school calendar, staff sometimes found it difficult to correct problems in midstream. For example, in one county, staff made a conscious decision to suspend the sanctioning process until attendance reporting problems could be resolved during the summer (this decision was not consistent with state policy).

During the early months of program implementation, ODHS staff attempted to identify and respond to questions and problems that counties encountered. These problems were brought to the attention of state staff by district-level ODHS staff or by counties directly. For example, in September, ODHS issued a 27-page memo answering questions that had been raised during and shortly after LEAP training sessions in June. Many other issues arose once counties began to operate the program, and ODHS issued policy clarifications where necessary. Many of these communications focused on the data system, which caused problems for many counties. The pace of clarifications and revisions eventually slowed.

Many counties saw the summer as a time to step back and reflect on the previous year and to devise new strategies to address problem areas. However, during the summer of 1990, counties were informed about a major change in the LEAP model: The program was expanded to serve 19-year-olds and teens who are pregnant with their first child.[14] This expansion was generally well-received by county staff. During the first year of operations, many counties had discovered that teens who were close to their nineteenth birthday when they became eligible for LEAP received very limited exposure to its services, and frequently chose to ignore the program completely. The extension of eligibility allowed counties to work with many of these teens for another year. In addition, staff had often suggested that it would be beneficial to begin offering services to teens during their first pregnancy rather than waiting until the birth of a child.

The program extension had important implications for the overall size of county programs, the caseloads of individual workers, processes for identifying eligible cases, the mix of education programs attended by teens, and other issues. In most counties, the LEAP program grew substantially, with no additional funding. Further, county staff needed to repeat, on a smaller scale, some of the steps they had completed during the previous summer (for example, identifying and assessing on-board eligibles). This made it difficult for them to "catch up" on implementation problems encountered during the first year.

C. How LEAP Is Operated

LEAP evolved as program operations proceeded. This development has been guided not only by the program regulations and other communications from ODHS, but also by the experiences of the counties themselves during the first 18 months of operations. This section describes how the program is currently intended to operate. Table 1.2 summarizes the key features of the program model, and the subsequent discussion outlines the procedures and

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[14] At the same time, pregnancy (beginning in the third month) was added to the list of exemption reasons. This applied to both first-time pregnancies and repeat pregnancies for teens who were already subject to LEAP. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, this policy change was much less popular with staff than the program expansion.

TABLE 1.2

KEY FEATURES OF THE LEAP MODEL

Eligibility Criteria	LEAP is mandatory for all pregnant teenagers or teenage custodial parents (under age 20) who are receiving AFDC and do not have a high school diploma or GED.[a] The mandate applies to teens who are case heads as well as to those receiving assistance on someone else's case.
Exemption Criteria	Teens are exempted from the LEAP mandate if one or more of the following apply: • The teen is pregnant and the pregnancy is in the third month or later.[b] • The teen is the primary caregiver of a child who is less than three months old. • Child care that the teen needs in order to attend school is not available. • Transportation to or from school or child care is necessary but not available. • The teen or the teen's child has an illness that is expected to last one month or longer. • The teen has been expelled from school and no other is available. • Other exceptional circumstances. When either the first or second reason applies, teens may choose to volunteer for LEAP.
Assessment Interview	Teens are required to attend an assessment interview when they become eligible for LEAP. Teens who miss two scheduled appointments without good reason are subject to a $62 sanction for each month that they fail to attend.
School Attendance Requirement	Teens are required to regularly attend a school or education program leading to a high school diploma or equivalent for the entire period that they remain eligible for LEAP.
School Attendance Standards	Any teen who enrolls in school receives a one-time bonus payment of $62. Teens who fail to enroll have their grant reduced by $62 in each month until they comply. Once enrolled, teens attending regular high school programs are eligible for a $62 attendance bonus if they have two or fewer unexcused absences in a month and four or fewer total absences. Teens with more than two unexcused absences have their welfare grant reduced by $62. Those with two or fewer unexcused absences, but more than four total absences, receive neither a bonus nor a sanction. Attendance standards for part-time education programs (such as adult education classes) vary according to the number of days scheduled. Attendance bonuses and sanctions occur three months after the attendance that triggers them.

(continued)

TABLE 1.2 (continued)

Good Cause Criteria	Teens who do not meet the attendance standard (according to reports provided by schools) are given an opportunity to demonstrate that they had good cause for each reported absence. Good cause may be granted if any of the following apply: • The teen or the teen's child was ill, injured, or incapacitated. • The teen's normal child care arrangement was unavailable, and no alternative was available. • The teen's normal transportation to school or child care was unavailable, and no alternative was available. • The teen or the teen's child had a scheduled or emergency appointment for medical, dental, or vision care. • The teen was needed to care for an ill family member. • A member of the teen's family died. • The teen had a scheduled or emergency appointment at a court or CDHS. • Other exceptional circumstances. In addition, absences caused by an illness or injury of the teen or her child are not counted if verified by a physician's statement.[c]
Support Services	Teens are entitled to receive program-funded child care if they need it to attend school; they may also receive transportation assistance for this purpose. Teens may get a summer job through the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), and the wages they earn are disregarded in welfare grant calculations. In addition, each teen is assigned to a case manager, who is responsible for helping the teen remove barriers that prevent her from attending school.

SOURCE: LEAP program regulations from the Ohio Department of Human Services.

NOTES: [a] From the program's inception until September 1, 1990, eligibility extended until the teen's nineteenth birthday, and only teen parents were included. On that date, eligibility was expanded to include 19-year-olds and teens who are pregnant with their first child.

[b] The pregnancy exemption was added effective September 1, 1990.

[c] When good cause is granted, an unexcused absence effectively becomes excused but is still counted in the monthly total. In contrast, absences for which the teen obtains a physician's statement are not counted at all.

routines that counties generally follow. As the discussion will make clear, the steps described below do not always operate as intended. However, it is important to understand the ideal before focusing on problems that have hindered operations.

1. Identifying eligible teens. Each family receiving AFDC in Ohio is assigned to an income maintenance (IM) worker, who determines the family's eligibility for assistance and calculates its monthly welfare grant.[15] IM staff are also responsible for identifying cases that are eligible for certain special programs such as JOBS and LEAP. Thus, when a teenager on AFDC becomes pregnant or has a child – or when a new AFDC case includes a teen parent – IM staff are expected to enter an appropriate code on the statewide computer system and refer the teen to the LEAP unit (in a few counties, IM staff handle the LEAP functions directly). It is the responsibility of LEAP staff to verify that the teen is indeed eligible for the program (that is, does not have a high school diploma or GED, is a pregnant teen or teen parent under age 20, and so forth).

2. Conducting assessment interviews. Once the LEAP unit receives the name of a teen parent who appears to be eligible for the program, staff contact the teen to confirm eligibility and schedule an assessment interview.[16] Attendance at scheduled assessment interviews is required, and teens who miss two such appointments without good cause are subject to a $62 sanction during each month until they attend (some counties have allowed teens more than two missed appointments before initiating the sanction process).

Assessment interviews are generally held in CDHS offices (or, in some cases, the teens' homes or schools). If the teen is on someone else's welfare case, the case head must also be interviewed. During this session, a case manager explains the LEAP program and discusses the teen's school plans and preferences. Exemptions and support service needs are identified, and teens sign a standard agreement stating that they understand the rules of the program. Counties obtain varying amounts of additional information about teens' backgrounds, family situations, and health problems. Some use a model assessment form provided by ODHS. At this point, a record is created in the computerized statewide LEAP tracking system for each eligible teen.

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[15] In some counties, separate units of IM staff process welfare applications. Once cases are approved to receive AFDC, they are transferred to workers responsible for ongoing maintenance of the case and periodic reviews of eligibility.

[16] During this interview, staff complete an intake form required for the evaluation. Staff then place a brief telephone call to MDRC's office, during which MDRC staff conduct a random assignment process that determines whether the teen will be placed in the treatment or control group. (As described below, this provides the basis for the evaluation's assessment of LEAP's impact on teens.) Teens assigned to the control group are debriefed and sent home, while those in the treatment group continue with the assessment interview.

3. Arranging support services. Teens are eligible to receive assistance with child care and transportation while they attend school. In most counties, teens who express an interest in using program-funded child care are referred to a separate day care unit within the human services agency that is able to provide information about the location of available day care slots. Under Ohio law, only certified or licensed child care providers can be supported with public funds. Transportation is often handled within the LEAP unit. Assistance may take the form of bus tokens or passes, monthly checks (usually for $15), reimbursement for mileage, and so forth.[17]

4. Verifying enrollment and monitoring attendance. After assessment, teens have 10 days to produce proof that they have enrolled in school. This could take a variety of forms, such as a school schedule, a letter from the school, or a form produced by LEAP and signed by school staff. Based on the enrollment verification, CDHS staff enter a school code for each teen into the statewide data system. Near the end of each month, the ODHS data processing unit in Columbus produces a School Absence Report (essentially a calendar with space for schools to mark and code absences) for each LEAP teen in the state and mails these forms to the appropriate education programs. Schools are expected to complete the absence reports and mail them to the county human services agency by the fifth of the following month. If information is not received by the deadline, LEAP staff are often expected to contact the school to inquire about the missing data. If attendance data cannot be obtained, the regulations require the CDHS to assume that the teen complied with the attendance requirement (and to issue a bonus) if she had previously provided proof of enrollment.

5. Adjusting AFDC grants. When a teen verifies her school enrollment, she (or the head of her AFDC case) receives a $62 enrollment bonus. This is issued as a separate check, usually arriving within a few weeks after enrollment is confirmed. If the teen does not enroll in school, LEAP staff send a Seven-Day Good Cause Notice providing the teen with an opportunity to explain her failure to comply. If the teen does not provide an acceptable excuse, she[18] receives a second notice (usually referred to as a "hearing letter") warning of an impending grant reduction. At this point, clients have 15 days to request a hearing. After the 15-day period expires, the welfare grant is reduced by $62 for each month that the teen fails to enroll. Depending on the county's configuration of the LEAP program, welfare grant adjustments may be processed by LEAP case managers or via an intra-departmental communication to the IM worker responsible for the case.

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[17] Each county receives a separate allocation for LEAP child care. Transportation assistance, on the other hand, must be funded out of the county's administrative allocation.

After a teen verifies her enrollment, attendance monitoring begins, and the teen's AFDC grant may be adjusted based on each month's attendance. If the School Absence Report for a particular month indicates that the teen met the attendance requirement (that is, for a high school student, missing four or fewer total days and having two or fewer unexcused absences), LEAP staff issue or request a $62 attendance bonus. This is included in the regular AFDC check three months after the attendance month. For example, good attendance in September triggers a bonus in December. If the School Absence Report indicates that the teen did not meet the attendance requirement,[19] LEAP staff send out a Seven-Day Good Cause Notice that indicates when the teen was reported absent. If no evidence of good cause is provided (this determination is made by case managers), the teen may be denied the bonus (if the total number of absences exceeds four) or may receive a sanction (if there are more than two unexcused absences). Once again, the grant adjustment will occur three months after the attendance month, preceded by a hearing letter.

This process continues until the teen reaches age 20 or obtains a high school diploma or GED, unless she becomes exempt or leaves welfare. If a teen is exempted because of being pregnant or providing care for a child under three months old, she may volunteer for LEAP. During the summer, all teens are encouraged to take summer jobs provided through the JTPA program (wages earned from these jobs are disregarded in AFDC grant calculations). Attendance is not monitored during the summer for teens attending high school programs

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[18] Since the LEAP mandate applies to all teenage *custodial* parents, eligible clients are not always female. In fact, in some cases, married couples receiving assistance through the AFDC-Unemployed Parent (AFDC-UP) program are both required to participate. However, in practice, the overwhelming majority of LEAP clients are young women. For simplicity's sake, feminine pronouns are used in this report when referring to the teens eligible for LEAP.

[19] As noted earlier, absences for which the teen can produce a doctor's statement are not counted. In some cases, medically verified absences are coded by schools on the School Absence Report. More often, teens must produce documentation in response to a Seven-Day Good Cause Notice.

(even if they are in summer school) but is required for those in year-round ABE (Adult Basic Education)/GED programs.[20]

When teens graduate, obtain a GED, or reach age 20, they may be referred directly to the JOBS program. However, because most of them have children under age six, they may not be required to participate in JOBS.[21]

IV. The LEAP Evaluation

LEAP represents an innovative effort to increase the educational attainment, and ultimately the self-sufficiency, of pregnant and parenting teens on welfare. The evaluation of LEAP that MDRC is conducting will provide information on how effective the initiative is as a policy tool for achieving this important goal. There are many questions that need answers in order to make this assessment. Can human services agencies clearly communicate the key elements of LEAP's financial structure to eligible teenagers, their parents (especially when they are the pertinent case heads), and school staff? Can schools and other education programs provide the necessary attendance information, and can county human services agencies monitor and respond to it well enough, to make this incentive structure work? To what extent will teens respond to these incentives by attending school regularly? To what extent will increased school attendance, if it occurs, translate into increased school completion and ultimately into increased economic self-sufficiency?

A. Components of the Evaluation

This report is the first in a series intended to address these and other questions. MDRC's six-year evaluation of LEAP began in 1989 and comprises three principal areas of research (Long and Bloom, 1989). The first is an assessment of program implementation and operations, which addresses the institutional response to LEAP at the local level – that is, the way in which county human services agencies and local schools have translated state LEAP regulations into the program procedures necessary to operate LEAP. It also examines how these procedures are applied to teens during their period of enrollment in the program. This report focuses on the experience of both the institutions and the teens during the early implementation phase. The analysis is based primarily on interviews with program staff, observation of program operations, and other information collected during site visits to the research counties. The second report, due in 1992, will present more quantitative findings on the program's operations based on an analysis of data collected from school records, welfare casefiles, and automated LEAP records.

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[20] In Ohio, preparation for the GED test is usually provided in Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs. These programs are popularly known as "GED programs." To avoid confusion, this report will use the term ABE/GED when referring to these programs and providers.

[21] In Ohio, clients with children between one and six years old are currently only required to participate in a JOBS assessment. Participation in additional activities is not mandatory.

The second major area of research is a study of LEAP's impacts on education, employment, welfare receipt, fertility patterns, and other outcomes. This study will use a design in which eligible teens are randomly assigned to a treatment group receiving the LEAP treatment or to a control group that does not participate in LEAP.[22] Differences between the two groups in terms of such outcomes as school attendance and completion, earnings, and receipt of AFDC, Food Stamps, and Medicaid will indicate the program's impact. Data on these outcomes will be obtained from school records; automated AFDC, earnings, and Medicaid records; and interviews with teens in the treatment and control groups (the first survey will be administered between November 1990 and March 1991, and the second will be completed during 1992). Preliminary estimates of impacts on some of the outcomes will be provided in the second report; final impact estimates will be presented in the final report, scheduled for completion in 1995.

The last component of the research is a benefit-cost analysis, which will draw on the impact and implementation studies to estimate LEAP's benefits and costs. It will assess program effectiveness from the standpoint of federal, state, and local government budgets; taxpayers; the welfare population; and society as a whole. Final impact and benefit-cost findings will not be available until the last report.[23]

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[22] Random assignment began in July 1989 and will end in September 1991. The sample will include approximately 9,000 teens (7,500 in the treatment group and 1,500 in the control group).

[23] In addition to conducting research in these three areas, MDRC has provided technical assistance to ODHS and to county human services departments in their implementation of LEAP. At the state level, this assistance has generally taken the form of discussions with ODHS administrators of lessons from past research on teen parents, policy options they have in designing and managing LEAP, and county issues and developments in LEAP implementation noted during site visits. At the county level, the assistance has focused on providing information about past research as it bears on LEAP (a "lessons" paper was prepared for their use) and facilitating county decisionmaking through discussions of operational problems and potential solutions.

In addition, a special research effort has been mounted in Cleveland. Approximately half of Cleveland's LEAP treatment group will have access to enhanced high school and ABE/GED services, which will emphasize on-site case management, child care, life skills training, parenting education, and employability development. The operation and impact of LEAP for these teens will be compared to those who receive "regular" program services.

B. Counties Included in the Evaluation

The evaluation is being conducted in 12 Ohio counties, which are identified in Figure 1.1. They were selected randomly from among the 26 counties with an estimated eligible LEAP caseload of approximately 40 or more at the beginning of program operations in 1989. These 26 counties include approximately 90 percent of the state's estimated LEAP caseload. Each had a probability of being selected that was proportional to its estimated eligible LEAP caseload. This weighted random selection method allows MDRC to generalize the results of the evaluation to the state as a whole, while at the same time avoiding the inefficiency of involving more than 12 counties in the study in order to obtain the overall sample necessary for a statistically reliable analysis.

Table 1.3 describes some key characteristics of the research counties. It is clear from these data that the counties in the study are a varied group, representing the diversity of Ohio. They include seven of Ohio's eight largest cities as well as several smaller cities and several predominantly rural areas.[24] The counties are geographically, ethnically, and culturally diverse, and they experience a range of economic conditions. Overall, the research counties include about two-thirds of the state's total AFDC caseload.

V. Overview of This Report

A. Data Sources

Information was gathered for this report primarily between September 1989 and January 1991 from structured interviews, a review of LEAP documents, and other sources. In each of the 12 research counties, interviews were conducted with administrative and line staff from the

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[24] The evaluation does not include any of the state's extremely small rural counties. The operation of LEAP in these counties may differ in some respects from the rural counties included in the evaluation, an issue MDRC intends to investigate prior to the next report.

FIGURE 1.1

OHIO COUNTIES IN THE LEAP EVALUATION

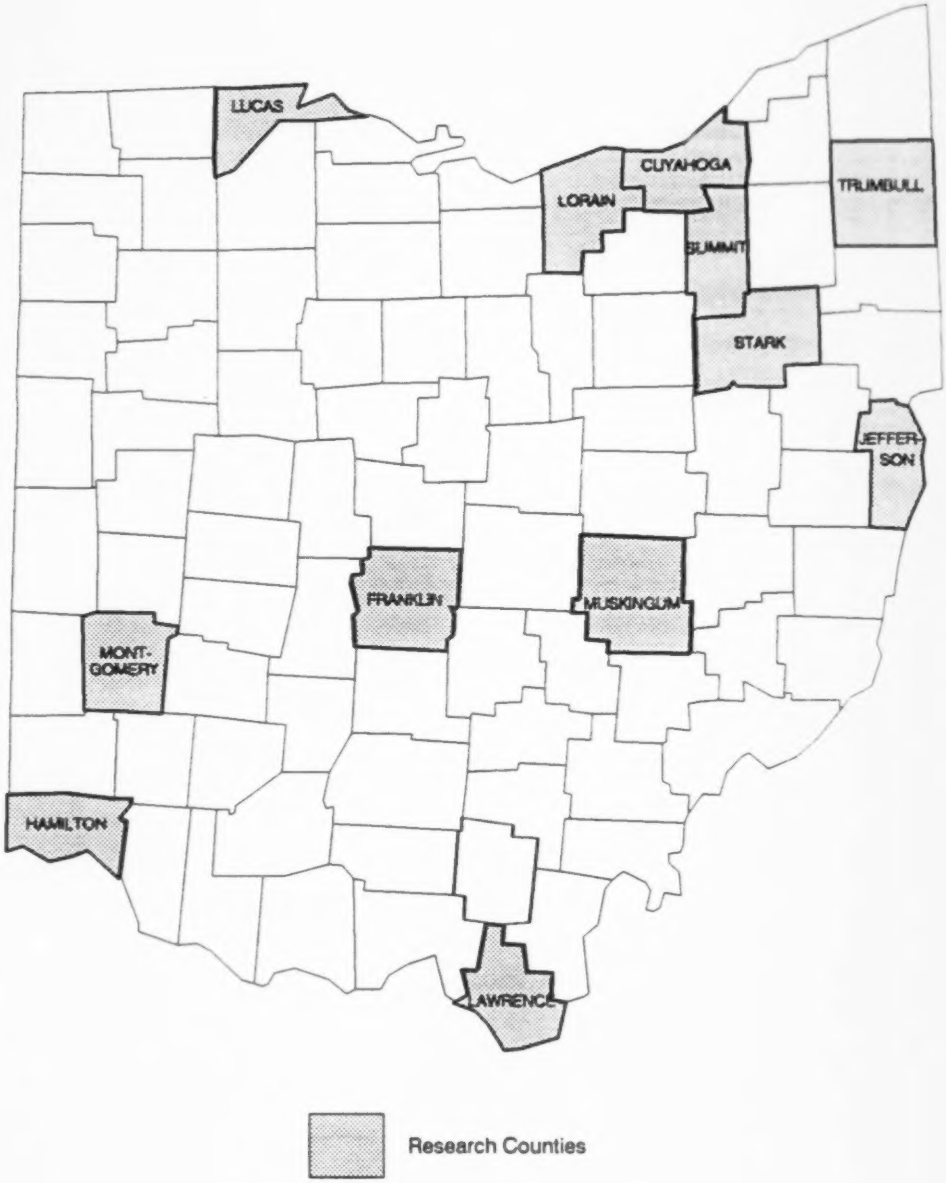

TABLE 1.3

SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF OHIO COUNTIES IN THE LEAP EVALUATION

County	Largest City	County Population (1988)	County Population Rank[a] (1988)	AFDC Recipients (1990)	Percent of Total State AFDC Recipients (1990)	Births to Teenagers/ Total Births (1987)	Poverty Rate (1989)	Unemployment Rate (11/90)	Percent Rural (1980)	Percent Nonwhite (1984)
Cuyahoga	Cleveland	1,430,800	1	124,644	18.9	13.2	18.8	4.4	0.4	25.1
Franklin	Columbus	938,100	2	63,070	9.6	12.5	12.1	3.5	4.2	16.8
Hamilton	Cincinnati	874,000	3	56,360	8.6	13.8	15.8	3.4	3.8	20.9
Jefferson	Steubenville	82,300	30	6,801	1.0	13.9	20.6	4.9	43.8	6.2
Lawrence	Ironton	62,700	40	7,120	1.1	18.2	24.9	4.8	47.8	3.1
Lorain	Lorain	270,500	10	16,392	2.5	13.7	11.3	10.6	15.1	8.4
Lucas	Toledo	466,300	6	41,009	6.2	15.5	15.6	6.8	6.0	15.4
Montgomery	Dayton	574,700	4	37,639	5.7	13.6	13.9	4.7	6.9	18.4
Muskingum	Zanesville	84,100	29	5,080	0.8	15.8	16.1	7.0	65.6	4.5
Stark	Canton	374,500	7	20,046	3.0	12.9	11.8	5.3	26.1	7.5
Summit	Akron	514,000	5	32,486	4.9	11.8	12.8	4.7	9.0	12.0
Trumbull	Warren	229,800	11	13,821	2.1	12.4	12.6	7.9	28.9	7.2
Totals for 12 Counties	---	5,901,800	---	424,468	64.6[b]	---	---	---	---	---
Weighted Average for 12 Counties[c]	---	---	---	---	---	13.3	15.1	4.9	8.8	17.2
Ohio Totals and Averages	---	10,854,200	---	657,490	100.0	13.2	13.7	5.3	26.7	11.6

SOURCES: Children's Defense Fund-Ohio and Junior Leagues of Ohio, 1989 (see references); Ohio Bureau of Employment Services; Ohio Department of Human Services; U.S. Bureau of the Census: City and County Data Book, 1988.

NOTES:
[a] There are 88 counties in Ohio.
[b] The discrepancy in this sum is the result of rounding.
[c] Weighted by county population as a percentage of the 12-county total population.

county department of human services, administrators and teachers in selected high schools and ABE/GED programs, and individuals from other pertinent organizations (depending on the county). The interviews focused on LEAP planning and early operations, and followed structured guides designed to produce generally comparable data across counties in several areas: institutional structure and client flow, interorganizational linkages, school enrollment and attendance monitoring, and case management. However, the interviews were also flexible enough to allow for coverage of issues outside the structured questions when appropriate.

MDRC reviewed numerous documents from ODHS, including the LEAP concept paper draft and final LEAP regulations, correspondence between ODHS and the counties, and documents such as LEAP budget and MIS (management information system) data. MDRC staff also attended numerous meetings involving ODHS officials. Documents from ODE – most notably communications with school districts – and notes from meetings involving ODE staff were also reviewed. In addition, MDRC examined a variety of documents collected during site visits to the individual counties. These dealt with LEAP staffing, program and school enrollments, sanctions, and other matters.

Another source of information is a survey being administered to treatment and control group members who entered the research sample prior to September 1, 1990 (referred to hereafter as the Wave I survey). This is a mixed-mode survey involving interviews by telephone and, for teens not reached by telephone, in-person interviews. Only data from the telephone interviews, which were administered between November 1990 and January 1991, were available in time for this report (data for the full survey sample will be analyzed in the next report). This preliminary sample includes about 400 completed interviews with teens in the treatment group and another 400 interviews with teens in the control group. The data used in this report are limited to tallies of answers to selected interview questions pertaining to child care usage, since the sample is not yet adequate for a fuller analysis of the data.

B. Organization of the Report

The remaining chapters of this report focus on a number of key issues that have emerged during the first year and a half of program operations and that have affected all counties to varying degrees. They are not necessarily problem areas, but rather matters that county staff are addressing in order to implement and operate the program.

Chapter 2 looks at issues related to the way in which county human services agencies have assigned LEAP program functions to their staff and defined the responsibilities of those staff. Chapter 3 addresses issues that have arisen as LEAP staff have worked to identify teenagers who are eligible for the program. The linkages between schools and human services agencies necessary to operate LEAP are the focus of Chapter 4. LEAP's financial incentive system – paying bonuses and enforcing sanctions – is covered in Chapter 5. The last chapter addresses child care, an important aspect of working with teen parents. Wherever possible, we have tried to highlight strategies that appear to be particularly effective or ineffective, and to distill general lessons that might be relevant to readers in Ohio and in other states that are working with the same population.

CHAPTER 2

INTERNAL STRUCTURE AND STAFFING

Chapter 1 described the central activities counties must perform to implement the LEAP model. Part I of this chapter begins by briefly reviewing those tasks and then examines the diverse organizational strategies counties have adopted to accomplish them, considering as well how the different approaches have helped shape the overall character of county LEAP programs. Part II discusses how organizational strategies can affect implementation of each of LEAP's major activities.

I. Developing an Organizational Strategy for LEAP

Once a teen has been identified as eligible for LEAP, implementation of the program model entails a variety of activities that are typically performed by different divisions within a county human services agency. The key program functions fall into three broad groups. These categories, and the traditional organizational home for each, are:

- **Welfare grant adjustment.** The LEAP attendance rules may lead to frequent changes in clients' AFDC grants. Such adjustments are handled by staff in the income maintenance (IM) division, who are responsible for determining welfare eligibility, issuing welfare checks, and processing Food Stamps and Medicaid.

- **Case management.** This includes a broad range of activities from basic processing and oversight (for example, managing the paper flow, conducting assessment interviews, making referrals for child care and transportation assistance, monitoring teens' attendance, and requesting sanctions and bonuses) to more proactive interventions designed to address barriers to school attendance, resolve other personal problems, and reach out to those who are not in compliance with the program. These activities are most familiar to staff in the social services division, which is responsible for a range of non-financial services such as counseling and health assistance, or the JOBS program,[1] which involves similar monitoring and processing activities.

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[1] What is now Ohio's JOBS program was previously called the Ohio Fair Work Program, a name that has been retained in some counties. The JOBS program, which is often staffed by workers with previous experience in the Ohio Fair Work Program, is a separate division in some counties. In others, it is placed within the social services division or within a section of the shared services or ancillary services division. These latter divisions are generally responsible for internal administrative functions such as personnel or training.

- **Support services.** Child care is the key support service provided to LEAP teens. In most counties, child care services are handled by a specialized unit within the social services division.[2]

Each of the main divisions – IM, social services, and JOBS – has strengths to contribute to LEAP, but no single division, as currently structured, is well suited to implement all the necessary tasks. This is especially true because staff tend to be highly specialized, and there is typically little overlap among the divisions. This means that counties have needed to develop organizational strategies to cover the range of LEAP functions. The decisions that have defined county strategies – specifically, which type of staff to use as case managers and how to assign responsibility for the key activities – have helped determine how the program operates and how successful counties have been in performing the key LEAP activities during the early implementation period.

A. Factors Affecting County Strategies

Decisions about where to place the LEAP program within the department and what types of staff to assign to it were left up to the counties. State program regulations describe county responsibilities but do not specify a staffing structure. County organizational approaches were influenced by several factors, including:

- **Program philosophy.** County administrators' views on the focus of LEAP and, specifically, the role of case managers profoundly influenced their decisions on staffing and structure. As discussed in Chapter 1, the LEAP regulations state that a case manager must be assigned to each LEAP teen, and they describe in some detail the basic processing and monitoring functions that must be performed. However, the proper scope and intensity of the case management are not specified beyond a broad statement calling on these staff to "assist the participant in gaining self-sufficiency skills in order to reduce and/or eliminate dependency on public assistance." [3] Counties interpreted this charge, and the nature of the LEAP program in general, quite differently. Some saw LEAP primarily as an income maintenance program involving close monitoring of participation, while others envisioned it as a proactive, social services effort involving financial incentives. These different philosophies have helped shape counties' organizational approaches.

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[2] Another critical activity, identifying eligible teens, is discussed in Chapter 3. IM staff are responsible for this task in all counties. County performance in this area is influenced less by the organizational issues discussed in this chapter and more by the specific programmatic strategies described in Chapter 3.

[3] ODHS has always taken a broad view of LEAP case management. But its guidance to counties, which are responsible for implementing this function, has increased over time. The February 1989 concept paper specified processing and monitoring activities, but did not stipulate that LEAP teens must be assigned a case manager, or discuss staff responsibility to work with teenagers beyond eligibility determination, assessment, and monitoring. The final regulations are considerably more specific, requiring (continued...)

- **County departments' experiences and structures.** Each county department had different experience and expertise to draw upon in mounting LEAP. Some counties were already working with education providers as part of their welfare-to-work program for adults or had experience operating programs for teen parents. These experiences and resources influenced administrators' decisions about how to structure LEAP. The interest of administrators and staff in being directly involved in the implementation of LEAP and the existing relationships between different divisions were also critical in some counties.

- **Priority placed on the LEAP program.** The levels of attention and priority county administrators gave to LEAP during a period when several new program initiatives were competing for staff resources and administrative planning also varied. The number of staff (relative to the caseload) assigned to LEAP, and the portion of their time earmarked for LEAP, appears to have been influenced partly by the priority that administrators placed on the program.

- **County characteristics.** As described in Chapter 1, the research counties represent a range of geographic, demographic, and economic conditions. These contextual factors exert a strong influence on LEAP's implementation: The most important distinction affecting structure and staffing decisions is between large urban counties and smaller suburban or rural areas. Certain organizational decisions that make sense in small counties are simply not feasible in larger departments.

Table 2.1 summarizes several key organizational characteristics of the county LEAP programs in the fall of 1990. The data in the table clearly indicate that counties have adopted

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[3](...continued)
the assignment of a case manager, listing some of the tasks that should be performed, and offering a broad overall definition of the function.

In addition to these official policy statements, ODHS convened a LEAP case management task force of district and county staff in the spring of 1989. This group outlined several case management models based on county plans for LEAP. Most of these models were consistent with the widely held view that teenage mothers require a comprehensive array of services to address their numerous and diverse needs, and that strong, active case management is a mechanism to address those needs. These descriptions were given to counties in May 1989 to provide guidance for the planning process. Discussions of the funding for LEAP during that same period led counties to believe that they would have sufficient resources to develop the intensive case management models outlined by the task force. This belief was reinforced when actual caseloads during the first year of operations were even smaller than anticipated.

TABLE 2.1

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF COUNTY LEAP PROGRAMS (AS OF FALL 1990)

County	Approximate Number of LEAP Cases[a]	Number of LEAP Case Managers[b]	Location of LEAP Within the Department	Job Position of LEAP Case Managers[c]	Staff Responsible for Grant Adjustments	Comments/Special Features
Cuyahoga	1,300	15 full-time	Shared services (with JOBS)	Social worker	Regular IM staff	• Placed 6 outreach workers in Cleveland high schools.
Franklin	500	12 full-time (staff responsible for all IM functions for LEAP households)	Income maintenance	IM worker	LEAP case managers	• Trained IM staff to provide intensive case management.
Hamilton	800	12 full-time[d]	JOBS	JOBS worker	Designated IM staff	• Had contracts with 2 organizations for outreach services.
Jefferson	60	2 part-time (staff also work with non-LEAP cases)	Social services	Social services worker	Designated IM staff in JOBS	• LEAP recently transferred from IM to Social Services Division.
Lawrence	50	4 part-time (staff spend small amounts of time on LEAP)	JOBS	JOBS worker	Designated IM staff	• Contract with GRADS program for some case management activities.
Lorain	275	2 full-time	JOBS	JOBS worker	Regular IM staff	• Contract with community organization to provide in-home parenting instruction.
Lucas	400	23 part-time (staff also work with non-LEAP cases)	Social services	Social services worker	LEAP case managers	• Operated program for teen parents prior to LEAP.

(continued)

TABLE 2.1 (continued)

County	Approximate Number of LEAP Cases[a]	Number of LEAP Case Managers[b]	Location of LEAP Within the Department	Job Position of LEAP Case Managers[c]	Staff Responsible for Grant Adjustments	Comments/Special Features
Montgomery	375	4 part-time (staff also work with non-LEAP cases)	Social services	Social services worker	Regular IM staff	• Operated program for teen parents prior to LEAP.
Muskingum	50	1 part-time (also works with non-LEAP cases)	JOBS	JOBS worker	Regular IM staff	• Recently consolidated LEAP caseload.
Stark	200	2 full-time	Income maintenance	Social services worker	Regular IM staff	• Case managers regularly lead life skills education sessions for LEAP teens.
Summit	400	2 full-time	Ancillary services	Case manager	Designated IM staff	• LEAP pays salary of Akron Public Schools attendance coordinator.
Trumbull	150	2 full-time (staff responsible for all IM functions for LEAP households)	Social services (with JOBS)	IM worker	LEAP case managers	

SOURCE: MDRC field research.

NOTES: [a] In most counties, the number of LEAP cases has increased since this information was obtained.

[b] Several counties have hired additional staff since this information was obtained. Figures do not include clerical or supervisory staff whose responsibilities do not include case management.

[c] The job titles in this table are for descriptive purposes only and do not necessarily correspond to official job classifications.

[d] This includes 6 temporary staff assigned to work on LEAP only from September 1990 to February 1991. Once the temporary staff are reassigned, the county plans to have 7 full-time LEAP case managers.

very different organizational approaches to the program. In several counties, considerable restructuring occurred during the first 18 months of program operations.

B. County Approaches

In general, counties face two interrelated issues in confronting the organizational challenge posed by LEAP: (1) how to parcel out and assign responsibility for the key program functions and (2) how to blend the functions required to implement the program. The following sections address these issues, focusing primarily on two of the three key activities described above: welfare grant adjustment and case management. The third activity, child care assistance, is discussed separately.

1. Assigning responsibility for key functions. LEAP case managers are responsible for coordinating all of the department's LEAP activities for teens in their caseloads. Thus, assigning responsibility for case management was perhaps the most important organizational decision facing counties. In many counties, the decision about which type of staff – IM, social services, or JOBS – would serve as case managers was strongly influenced by administrators' views of the scope of that function. As the fifth column of Table 2.1 indicates, in the two most common approaches case management responsibility was assigned to:

- **JOBS or social services workers.** Despite the program's emphasis on financial incentives, the majority of counties placed LEAP case management responsibilities with JOBS or social services staff, often because these workers had experience with the type of case management the county wanted to provide to LEAP teens. JOBS staff were often selected because of their experience in monitoring clients' participation and knowledge about education options in the community. In counties where case management responsibility was placed with social services staff, such as Lucas and Montgomery, this decision was typically made because the division had experience working with teen parents. Since JOBS and social services staff are generally not trained as IM workers and cannot process grant changes, in most cases this choice implied that responsibility for the two key functions would be divided among different staff.

- **Income maintenance workers.** Another set of counties – including Trumbull, Franklin, and Summit (during the first year of operations) – noting the critical importance of welfare grant adjustments, assigned case management responsibilities to IM staff, and chose not to divide the key functions. These counties were not necessarily less interested in providing comprehensive services to teens. Rather, they felt that the program's IM functions were central and that IM workers were capable of handling (or could be trained to handle) whatever other functions were deemed appropriate.

Regardless of the type of workers selected, most counties placed LEAP case managers in a new, specialized unit and assigned them to work only with LEAP cases. However, this was not always the case. In Montgomery and Lucas counties, social services staff work with both LEAP teens and other social services cases. In Muskingum County, LEAP cases were initially divided among several JOBS workers, each of whom was also responsible for a large number of regular JOBS clients. This is similar to the current arrangement in Lawrence County.

Three counties designated agency staff to serve as case managers but chose to assign parts of the case management function to outside agencies through contracts. Summit County has purchased the services of an Akron Public Schools official, who is responsible for compiling all attendance information for Akron teens and for conducting educational assessment interviews with dropouts and teens who wish to enroll in nontraditional programs. During the first year of operations, Hamilton County contracted with two outside agencies to provide outreach services focusing on noncompliant teens. Lawrence County contracted with the local GRADS program to take over many aspects of the case management function.

2. **Blending functions.** Once responsibility for case management was assigned, counties needed to decide which activities case managers would perform, how to parcel out responsibility for the remaining functions, and how to promote interdivisional communications when the key tasks were divided. Counties adopted three general organizational approaches to facilitate the blending of LEAP functions:

- **Restructuring job responsibilities.** Some counties created new departmental structures or job descriptions to facilitate coordination of the different LEAP functions. The fullest version of this strategy is represented by the counties, such as Franklin and Trumbull, that assigned case management responsibilities to IM staff. These counties virtually eliminated the need for interdivisional communication by blending the key tasks into one job description. Lucas County chose a similar strategy – although its case managers are social services workers – by developing procedures to allow LEAP case managers to process grant changes directly without involving IM staff.

- **Creating new organizational structures.** A few counties divided the key functions – assigning responsibility for case management to JOBS or social services staff and for grant adjustments to IM staff – but then used creative organizational strategies to facilitate coordination between staff with different LEAP responsibilities. In some instances, staff have been placed in a division that is not their traditional "home." For example, Stark County assigned LEAP case management to social services workers but placed them in the IM division. In Trumbull County, IM workers handle all aspects of the LEAP cases, but they work in the social services division under the JOBS coordinator. Hamilton County achieved the same objective by consolidating LEAP grant adjustment functions with a few designated IM workers and pairing these staff with the LEAP case managers, who are in the JOBS unit (Jefferson, Lawrence, and Summit later shifted to similar arrangements).

- **Building linkages.** A subset of the counties with divided functions chose not to pursue special organizational structures to link the two sets of workers. Instead, grant adjustment was left to regular IM workers (each of whom is generally responsible for a handful of LEAP cases within a large general caseload), and administrators focused on developing paper-flow procedures to allow LEAP staff to communicate with IM staff when grant adjustments were necessary.[4] Developing these internal communication systems has been quite complex, especially in large counties. For example, in Cuyahoga County, responsibility for LEAP IM functions has been spread among several hundred IM workers in many locations. LEAP administrators have devoted considerable time and energy to developing paper-flow systems that enable the LEAP case managers to notify the appropriate IM worker whenever grant changes are required (which can be every month in some cases).

These strategies are illustrated in the fourth, fifth, and sixth columns of Table 2.1.

II. Implications of Program Structure for the Key LEAP Functions

County decisions on the staffing structure for LEAP have helped determine which components of the program were most easily implemented and emphasized in the first year of operations. This section discusses how organizational strategies can affect program performance in each of the major activity areas described at the beginning of the chapter.

A. The Grant Adjustment Process

In counties where IM staff handle both the grant adjustment and case management functions for LEAP cases, the program's financial treatment – that is, the bonuses and sanctions – was put into place relatively quickly (as long as school attendance reports were received). This is because LEAP staff have direct responsibility for making grant changes in response to teens' school attendance. This process has also worked relatively smoothly in most of the counties that divided the functions but developed special organizational models to consolidate IM functions among a few staff and/or facilitate linkages between LEAP case managers and IM workers.

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[4] In most counties, AFDC cases are divided among IM workers geographically or by some other criterion unrelated to whether the case includes a LEAP teen. Thus, LEAP cases tend to be dispersed relatively evenly among the entire IM staff. Since LEAP cases are a small fraction of the overall AFDC caseload, they also represent a small proportion of each worker's cases.

In contrast, in a number of the counties where the functions are divided and no special structures have been developed to facilitate communication, LEAP's financial treatment has not been fully implemented. This is generally because responsibility for LEAP grant adjustments is dispersed among many IM workers, each of whom carries a few LEAP cases among a total caseload often exceeding 300. Paper-flow procedures have not proved to be an effective means of promoting interdivisional linkages in this environment, and LEAP grant adjustment requests often assume low priority for IM workers. Thus, in several counties, sanctions requested by LEAP case managers are frequently not processed in a timely manner by IM staff. This means that teens are not always sanctioned even when LEAP staff are aware that they have failed to enroll in school or are not meeting the LEAP attendance requirements. In many of these cases, poor communications also mean that LEAP case managers do not know whether their clients' grants have been adjusted. Bonuses, which are easier to process than sanctions, also have not been issued consistently, but these cases are more likely to be identified, since the teens are more apt to follow up with their LEAP case manager when they do not receive money to which they are entitled. These problems have been most common in larger counties, where LEAP cases are divided among many IM workers. Staff suggest that problems in administering sanctions and bonuses consistently have undermined the credibility of the program with some teen parents and may reduce the behavior modification sought by LEAP.

This is not to say that the grant adjustment process cannot be implemented effectively without major organizational changes. Lorain County, which appears to operate the financial incentive system relatively efficiently, has made no special structural arrangements. Rather, LEAP administrators have developed an effective set of forms to facilitate communications with IM workers, and LEAP case managers are extremely aggressive about following up on their requests for grant changes. However, Lorain is unusual among counties with similar structures.[5]

B. Case Management

The character of each county's case management effort is influenced by both the vision of program administrators and the organizational structure. In a few counties, administrators have chosen to restrict LEAP case management to the basic processing and monitoring activities required in the regulations. Organizational factors are less likely to affect the implementation of case management in counties with this relatively limited vision of the function.

However, the majority of counties have attempted to go beyond the basic model to implement a social services orientation and a more proactive approach to case management. This more expansive view of LEAP's mission is generally popular with staff and appears to have contributed to high morale in most counties. Although there is frustration about caseload sizes (discussed below), excessive paperwork, and other issues, case managers generally find the work stimulating and interesting. In most counties, LEAP staff volunteered or applied to work on the program, and turnover has generally not been a major problem.

A county's ability to operationalize this broader vision is affected by several organizational factors. These include:

- **Staff training and experience.** To some extent, a proactive approach has been more readily achieved in counties that have separated the key functions and assigned case management responsibility to staff with a background in social services or counseling. Counties that have used income maintenance workers often have case managers with more narrowly defined roles. In fact, two counties – Jefferson and Summit – decided to separate the IM and case management functions after several months of operations, in part to increase the level of proactive case management. (Both counties also consolidated LEAP IM functions with a few workers and paired them with the case managers to avoid the grant adjustment problems described above.)

  However, the use of IM workers as LEAP case managers is not *necessarily* a constraint on strong case management, as evidenced by the LEAP program in Franklin County, where all LEAP staff were hired from income maintenance units. In this county, a proactive approach has been achieved by (1) the selection of IM workers with a strong interest in working with young parents, (2) the provision of extensive training in case management, and (3) the development of a case management manual, with specific guidelines for detailed assessments, home visits, and outreach. IM staff who become LEAP case managers often express positive views of their new positions, which tend to offer more opportunities to exercise discretion, interact with clients, and offer assistance and support.

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[5] In all counties, the teen identification function is also partly dependent on intra-agency communications between regular IM staff and LEAP case managers, as discussed in Chapter 3.

- **Caseload size.** High caseloads limit the degree to which proactive case management can occur. Caseload size is determined by a number of factors, including the county's success in identifying LEAP-eligible teens, its LEAP funding allocation, the availability of additional resources, and local decisions about how to use the allocation and other resources. Most counties devote their entire LEAP allocation to supporting the LEAP case management and supervisory staff. Some counties use a portion of the allocation to support LEAP IM functions. As noted above, a few counties have spent LEAP resources on contracts with external organizations. While the services these contractors provide to LEAP teens can reduce some of the case managers' responsibilities, the use of outside contractors nevertheless results in reduced resources for LEAP case managers and contributes to higher caseloads.

  Table 2.1 summarizes the number of case managers and eligible LEAP cases in the research counties. It should be noted that it is difficult to make cross-county comparisons of caseloads based on these figures because staff responsibilities vary substantially. Nevertheless, the table indicates that there is substantial variation in caseload size. For example, the LEAP case managers in Summit County, where a contract is in place, have caseloads of nearly 200 teenagers, but they do not handle either IM functions or the activities performed by the contractor. Franklin County LEAP staff have substantially smaller caseloads – approximately 40 LEAP cases each – but they handle both IM and case management functions for these cases (and, in addition, the IM functions for all other assistance cases in the teens' households). It should be noted that in all counties the caseloads of LEAP case managers are substantially smaller than those of IM workers.[6]

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[6] To put these numbers in context, caseload sizes in the Teenage Parent Demonstration range from about 50 cases in the two New Jersey programs to about 100 in Illinois. As with the LEAP caseload figures presented in Table 2.1, these Teenage Parent Demonstration figures refer to the total eligible cases assigned to case managers, not just cases actively participating in the program. Case managers in these programs generally have substantially broader responsibilities than do LEAP case managers, including the conduct of numerous internal workshops, although their monitoring role appears smaller. Moreover, demonstration program staff also includes a number of specialists to work on specific problem areas, such as an educational specialist (Hershey and Nagatoshi, 1989).

- **Staff responsibilities.** While a proactive orientation has been achieved within the context of different structures, it appears that this approach to case management is less likely to be adopted when case managers devote a considerable portion of their time to non-LEAP cases or activities. When the case managers' LEAP responsibilities are severely "diluted," it is difficult for them to develop a broad understanding of the issues facing these clients, to develop relationships with service providers, and more generally to consider LEAP cases a priority. This is the case, for example, in Lawrence County, where the case managers each serve a handful of LEAP teens among several hundred JOBS cases. (However, it is also important to note that the GRADS program has been contracted to provide a variety of services to teens who are enrolled in high school programs in Lawrence County.) In Muskingum County, LEAP cases were originally divided among four JOBS workers. Because a relatively small number of LEAP cases were divided among these workers, LEAP appears to have had a low profile in the agency. Now the LEAP cases have been consolidated with one worker, although grant adjustment functions are still dispersed among the IM staff.

Thus, several of the counties, using a variety of organizational strategies, have been successful in developing a more intensive version of case management than is called for in the LEAP regulations. In these counties, various strategies have been adopted to facilitate the teens' compliance with the LEAP mandate. These have included:

- **Home visits.** Case managers in several counties make home visits to gain a better appreciation of the teenagers' home environment, the supports available to them, and the barriers they must overcome to maintain good attendance records in school. Some counties (for example, Lorain and Franklin) are attempting to make home visits for the entire LEAP caseload. In others, home visits are initiated when a problem has been identified. For example, in Hamilton County, a visit is scheduled whenever the teen does not respond to the initial call-in letter.

- **Assessments.** In all counties, an initial assessment is performed when an eligible teen enrolls in the LEAP program. In counties in which case managers play primarily a monitoring role, the assessment session is generally restricted to the explanation of program requirements and benefits and the completion of various forms. In counties with a stronger social work orientation, the assessments are more extensive and address a broader set of issues. In a few counties (such as Muskingum), the assessment may include the administration of basic skills tests to assist the case manager in offering education counseling.

- **Ongoing contact, counseling, and special activities.** Many case managers in proactive counties have attempted to maintain ongoing contact (typically once per month) with every teen on their caseload, either by telephone or in person. These contacts help case managers find out how the participants are doing, provide positive reinforcement for the teens' efforts, and offer assistance and counseling on a variety of issues such as family planning, housing, health, child care, parenting, relationships with partners and family, and employment. LEAP staff in Stark County organize special workshops nearly once a month to address particular needs of their clients. For example, workshops on independent living, parenting, and maternal and child health have been offered. These workshops, which are usually held in a community location on a non-school day, generally involve outside speakers.

- **Joint action with school staff.** Case managers sometimes initiate "case conferences" with GRADS teachers in an effort to jointly assist teens in removing barriers to school attendance. In some counties, case managers communicate with school staff fairly regularly, not only to determine the teens' attendance patterns, but also to discuss academic progress, review problems, and act as the teen's advocate. (GRADS teachers, who perform similar functions, thus often serve as an extension of the case managers while the teens are attending school.) In Summit County, LEAP and Akron Public Schools staff jointly organized a graduation ceremony for 60 LEAP teens who earned a high school diploma or GED.

- **Referrals and external linkages.** Case managers in proactive counties frequently refer teens to other agencies for direct services. In most cases, linkages with other providers are informal – that is, the case manager uses knowledge about available resources in the community to match client needs with existing services. However, a few counties have developed more formal liaisons with service providers. Lorain County, using a special ODHS grant, has contracted with a local community-based organization that uses volunteers to provide weekly parenting instruction to teens in their homes. Franklin County staff are discussing the possibility of working with a local agency to offer family planning and health counseling, and Hamilton County is attempting to establish a mentoring program for LEAP teens.

- **Outreach.** Various outreach strategies are used in proactive counties to enhance compliance and address client needs. For example, in Cuyahoga County, LEAP case managers are stationed in six Cleveland high schools. These outreach workers regularly meet with students in school, conduct home visits, and attempt to obtain more complete information about teens' attendance and performance. Montgomery County is planning a similar, but more limited, arrangement with the Dayton Public Schools. In several counties, case managers attempt personal contact with teens who fail to meet the attendance requirements to determine if there is a barrier they can help to remove. In some counties, outreach efforts (including home visits) are fairly extensive when a teen identified as eligible for LEAP does not respond to call-in letters or fails to come in for a scheduled assessment.

Many of these activities were particularly prevalent during the first year of operations, when LEAP clients were gradually being identified and county allocations were based on overestimates of the eligible population (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of these estimates). Both of these factors contributed to caseloads that were smaller than expected. However, since the summer of 1990, caseloads have grown dramatically in all counties owing primarily to the state decision to expand LEAP eligibility to 19-year-olds and pregnant teens without committing additional staff resources, and to improvement in counties' ability to identify LEAP-eligible teens.[7] Case buildups have resulted in a declining level of home visits and outreach to noncompliant teens. In fact, in some counties (such as Cuyahoga), the requirements for home visits and other proactive efforts had to be changed as caseloads grew and made such activities impossible on a systematic basis.

LEAP case managers in many counties are increasingly expressing frustration that they do not have sufficient time to address the complex and multifaceted problems that interfere with regular school attendance for many LEAP teens. Case managers fairly consistently estimate that caseloads no larger than 75 are needed if they are expected to perform functions beyond basic processing and monitoring.[8]

C. Child Care

In most counties, child care has remained the responsibility of a specialized unit within the social services division. However, a few counties have made LEAP staff responsible for this function. In Montgomery County, LEAP case managers had experience with child care in the county's preexisting Teen Parent Program and continued to play this role under LEAP. In Jefferson and Stark counties, there were no specialized child care staff available to work with LEAP teens, and responsibility fell to LEAP staff by default. (In Jefferson, child care staff assumed this role in the second year of operations.)

In most cases, teens in need of child care assistance must make an appointment with child care staff and go through a second intake and assessment procedure, often in a different location. Thus, paper-flow procedures are generally necessary to refer teens who need child care services to the appropriate staff. The efficiency of these procedures can effectively determine how quickly a teen is able to start school. Several LEAP staff have reported that the teens often miss appointments with day care staff or fail to follow up on referrals to potential providers. Since LEAP staff do not oversee this process directly, they are dependent on timely feedback from the day care unit. In some instances – mostly in the larger counties – child care staff have been unable to quickly meet with the LEAP teens and assist them in locating appropriate day care options. Child care is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

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[7] The growth in caseloads after the program expansion actually brought them approximately to the levels that had been budgeted for by ODHS during the first year of operations.

[8] A smaller figure is usually cited by case managers who are also responsible for income maintenance functions.

III. Conclusions

Because LEAP necessitates the blending of traditionally separate functions, and because the program regulations do not specify a staffing structure and leave open to interpretation the proper scope of case management services, counties have developed a variety of creative organizational structures to operate the program. In most cases, these strategies have involved either new organizational structures, nontraditional assignment of responsibilities to staff, or paper-flow procedures designed to facilitate intra-agency communications. The particular strategies chosen by each county reflect such factors as their views of LEAP and their organizational backgrounds. At this point, it appears that several different strategies can be used with some success – and can produce high levels of job satisfaction for LEAP staff – but that each approach has particular strengths and weaknesses.

Specifically, counties that have assigned responsibility for both case management and grant adjustment to IM workers have been relatively successful at operating LEAP's financial incentive system (assuming that school attendance data are available), but have needed to work harder to implement intensive case management strategies because staff generally do not have extensive training or experience in these areas. Other counties have divided the key LEAP functions to improve their capacity to provide case management, and several have implemented strong, activist approaches using JOBS or social services staff as case managers. However, in the absence of organizational changes to facilitate intra-agency linkages, these counties have often found it difficult to process welfare grant adjustments, in part because responsibility for this function is dispersed among a large number of IM staff. Other general lessons include:

- Regardless of how responsibilities for LEAP functions are assigned, counties are more likely to encounter difficulties when staff are not primarily dedicated to working on LEAP. When LEAP cases are not a substantial part of the staff's responsibilities, the program seems to receive a lower priority. This is true of both case management and income maintenance activities.

- Proactive case management is difficult to achieve when the LEAP staff have large caseloads relative to the functions they perform. Since the summer of 1990, caseloads have been rising across all counties and have diminished the amount of proactive assistance provided to teens.
- The existence of the GRADS program in many high schools in Ohio potentially provides a powerful on-site extension of many LEAP case management functions.

CHAPTER 3

IDENTIFYING ELIGIBLE TEENS

Because LEAP does not serve all AFDC recipients, a key task facing counties is to identify the teenage parents who are eligible for the program. During the first 18 months of program operations, counties have discovered that this seemingly straightforward assignment is in fact quite complex and difficult.

This chapter examines the issues that counties face in identifying LEAP-eligible teenagers. The first section describes the start-up activities undertaken to identify teenagers who were already eligible for LEAP when the program began, and the second focuses on the ongoing identification effort. The final section of this chapter describes the characteristics of those teens who have thus far entered the LEAP research sample.

I. Initial Identification of the Eligible Caseload

In any new program serving a specific subset of the welfare caseload, operating agencies must focus on identifying two categories of eligible clients: (1) those who are already eligible when the program begins, and (2) those who become eligible for the program over the course of its operation. In the long run, the second group is obviously more important. However, as Chapter 1 notes, during the LEAP planning period, identifying teens in the first category – the "on-board" eligible group – was a critical issue.

Identifying teen parents who are eligible for LEAP is unusually complex because, unlike the welfare-to-work programs that tend to be more familiar to agency staff, LEAP targets some clients who are not heads of welfare cases (for example, a teen parent who lives in the same household with both her mother – who is the case head – and her child).[1] Because welfare programs have traditionally focused almost exclusively on case heads, data systems and operating procedures are not designed to obtain detailed information on other members of the household. For example, like most systems of its kind, Ohio's current computerized welfare data base includes basic information on each member of a welfare case and indicates which recipient is the case head. However, information on the relationships among the recipients in the case is not available. Thus, for example, while it is possible to identify a teen parent who heads a case (essentially any case head under age 20), it is extremely difficult to identify a teen parent who receives AFDC on her mother's case: The teen and her child would be listed as members of the case, but it would not be possible to determine that they were mother and child and not siblings. Since teenage mothers on their own mother's case account for a large percentage of the LEAP caseload, the computer system cannot be relied upon to identify all eligible cases. Instead, manual reviews of AFDC casefile information are necessary.[2]

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[1] Teenage parents in the AFDC-Unemployed Parent (AFDC-UP) program are also required to be in LEAP. In some of these cases, both parents are subject to the program. However, only one – usually the man – is the case head.

In starting up the program, it would have been possible to rely on periodic case reviews (called "redeterminations" or "reapplications") to gradually identify the eligible LEAP caseload. Welfare workers conduct two such reviews annually for most AFDC cases and could have used the occasion to establish which cases included a teen parent.[3] However, because LEAP focuses on school attendance for a high school-age population, it was important to bring as many teens as possible into the program prior to the beginning of the academic year. Thus, counties were expected to identify and interview all on-board eligible teens during the spring and summer of 1989.

ODHS attempted to assist counties in the manual identification of on-board cases by producing county-specific computer printouts of all AFDC cases that included at least one female between the ages of 12 and 19 and another recipient between the ages of zero and six. The lists were generated in April (and updated in June), and counties were instructed to review the AFDC files of the identified cases to determine whether they did, in fact, include eligible teen parents. In general, it is possible to determine from casefile data whether there is a teen parent on the case and, in some instances, whether the teen has a high school diploma or GED. ODHS staff knew that some of the cases on the printouts would not include teen parents (that is, the identified young recipients would be siblings), but assumed that the lists would include the full universe of eligible teens and would obviate the need for counties to manually review their entire AFDC caseloads.

When counties began to review the printouts, it quickly became apparent that fewer than half the cases listed actually included eligible teen parents. For example, staff in Lorain County received a list of just over 500 cases. During the review they found that about half of these cases included no teen parents – usually because the young children were siblings, rather than offspring, of teenage recipients on the case. Another one-fifth of the cases on the list were no longer receiving AFDC. In the end, fewer than 150 of the cases on the printout included eligible teens. Similarly, in Franklin County, fewer than 30 percent appeared to be eligible.[4]

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[2] The problem of identifying teenage mothers whose own mothers are the heads of their welfare cases has also been noted in connection with the programs in the OFA Teenage Parent Demonstration, which serves a similar population (Hershey, 1990).

[3] The redetermination process is not ideally suited for identifying LEAP teens who are embedded in their mother's case because only the case head is required to attend the redetermination conference.

Although state officials never intended the computer lists to provide accurate estimates of the eligible population, they did not anticipate that such a large proportion of the cases appearing on the lists would be found ineligible. Thus, these lists, coupled with earlier estimates of the eligible population that were also derived from computerized data about existing cases, created the impression that the LEAP population would be larger than it was in reality. More important, state budgeting for the program was based on similar estimates.

The counties' experiences in identifying the on-board caseload affected the first year of program operations in several ways. First, since both state and county LEAP budget allocations were based on overestimates of the eligible caseload, funding levels were higher than might otherwise have been the case during the first year of operations. This meant, for example, that LEAP case managers had relatively small caseloads. Second, client identification problems slowed the pace of implementation in many counties. Third, and more generally, counties found that the process of identifying cases was a complex and time-consuming task requiring constant attention.

II. Ongoing Identification of Eligible Teenagers

Once the LEAP program got under way, income maintenance (IM) staff became responsible for manually identifying and referring teenage parents to LEAP program staff as they became eligible. Identification is performed either by intake workers at the point of welfare application (for example, when a teenage mother applies for her own AFDC grant) or by workers in ongoing IM units when a teenager in an existing AFDC case becomes pregnant or has a baby. In most counties, when a LEAP-eligible teenager is identified, the IM worker is expected to both enter an appropriate "target code" ("L") on the computer system and send a referral form to LEAP caseworkers.[5] Preparation of the IM workers to perform these LEAP functions has varied from county to county. However, all IM workers have been trained and in some cases retrained with regard to LEAP identification.

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[4] In addition to finding that the majority of the cases on the computer printouts did not include eligible teens, counties also noticed that some cases that did include eligible teens had not appeared in the listings. Thus, several counties began to use other methods of identifying and recruiting on-board eligible teens. As discussed in the next section, these methods are still being used to augment the ongoing client-identification capability. It is not immediately clear why the state listing omitted eligible teens.

Although the 12 counties included in the evaluation have experienced problems in accurately identifying all LEAP-eligible teens (as discussed below), approximately 7,000 teenagers have entered the research sample for the LEAP evaluation during the first 18 months of program operations.[6] In addition, many other teens have been identified by LEAP staff but have not yet entered (and may never enter) the program because they have failed to show up for scheduled assessment interviews. In many cases, these teens have been sanctioned by the LEAP program.

A. Problems of Identification

Most of the research counties have not been successful in implementing the intended identification/referral process thoroughly and accurately. This is clear because LEAP staff often receive referrals from other sources (see below) and find that these teens have been eligible for LEAP for some time, but were never referred to them by IM staff. Failure to properly identify LEAP-eligible teenagers occurs in both intake and ongoing IM units. However, it appears that the problem is typically more acute among staff in ongoing units. This is probably tied to the inherent difficulty of identifying teenage parents who are not case heads, as discussed earlier. Workers in ongoing units are expected to identify, code, and refer to LEAP any teenager on an existing welfare case who becomes pregnant or gives birth for the first time. In most cases, these teenagers are not case heads, because anyone who heads a welfare case must have already had a child when she applied for AFDC. Since the eligibility determination system is designed to focus on case heads, workers in ongoing units may have little direct contact with the teens they are expected to identify and refer to LEAP.[7] By contrast, intake workers are responsible for identifying teenagers who are eligible at the point of welfare application, which involves a face-to-face interview. Whenever the applicant is a teenager who does not have a high school diploma or GED, a LEAP referral is virtually certain.[8]

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[5] Accurate target coding is critical because these codes identify LEAP cases in the statewide welfare data system. However, coding a case "L" does not automatically trigger a referral from IM to LEAP staff.

[6] Teens may enter the research sample at two different points, depending on the county. In some cases, random assignment occurs when the teen shows up for an assessment interview. In others, a telephone interview is conducted prior to that point to obtain background information for the evaluation. Thus, some of the teens in the research sample have never attended a LEAP assessment interview.

The two-part identification procedure (coding and submitting a referral form) can result in an error at either point. In some cases, it appears that when an IM worker fails to identify a LEAP-eligible teenager, both steps in the process are omitted. However, most counties reported that the IM workers often code the case properly but fail to make the referral to LEAP staff.

There is evidence that the identification problem has diminished over time, and there is reason to believe that, as LEAP becomes a more standard part of the agency landscape, IM workers will have a better understanding of the LEAP program and its eligibility criteria. County staff expressed great hopes that the new statewide computer system (CRIS-E) – which allows for the coding of case member relationships and is designed to generate referrals automatically – will solve the identification problem.[9] However, even with an automated system, the need for careful training and quality control procedures will remain.

1. **Magnitude of the problem.** There is, unfortunately, no straightforward way of estimating the magnitude of the identification problem, inasmuch as the only method of determining the size of the entire eligible population would be to have eligible cases properly coded. Administrators in some of the counties that have experienced difficulty have estimated that IM workers are identifying about 60 to 70 percent of the eligibles, but the basis for this estimate is unclear. Statewide estimates produced by ODHS are similar in magnitude.

While it is not possible to determine the proportion of LEAP-eligible cases that are being missed, there is strong evidence that the magnitude of the problem varies substantially across counties. Based on discussions with LEAP staff, it appears that a few counties – such as Lorain and Stark – have succeeded in identifying nearly all eligible teenagers. However, if one assumes that each county's AFDC caseload includes proportionally similar numbers of eligible teenage parents (which is probably not completely accurate), there are counties – most notably Lawrence – that have identified less than half of the eligible caseload. Most of the research counties seem to fall somewhere between these two extremes.

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[7] This is particularly likely to be true for teens who were eligible for LEAP when the program began, but did not appear on state lists. In these cases, there may be no subsequent pregnancy or birth to attract the attention of the staff.

[8] However, difficult situations can be encountered at application as well. For example, an application might involve a three-generation household in which one of the recipients is a teenage mother, but she is not the case head. Intake workers would be responsible for identifying and referring such a teen to LEAP, and she might not appear at the interview.

[9] When this report was completed, some counties had converted to CRIS-E for the AFDC eligibility process. However, the CRIS-E subsystem for LEAP was not in place yet.

2. Causes of the problems. While there are some county-specific reasons for the ongoing problem of identifying LEAP-eligible teens by manually checking records, the most fundamental cause appears to be the demanding nature of IM workers' jobs. In virtually every county, IM workers have very high caseloads, often exceeding 300 cases. Moreover, IM functions are fairly complex; the IM workers are responsible for remembering the eligibility criteria for numerous programs and services, and the criteria and programs change frequently. LEAP cases are a relatively small percentage of the AFDC caseload, and therefore the LEAP criteria may have less salience to IM workers than those for other large programs such as JOBS. Moreover, when a teenage mother is on her mother's grant, IM workers are likely to focus more of their attention on programs for which the case head is eligible. An additional complication is that IM workers usually have no way of learning about the pregnancy of a teenager on an AFDC case, although pregnant teens are now eligible for LEAP.[10] One final contributing factor is that in many counties there is high staff turnover in the IM units.

B. County Strategies for Dealing with Identification Problems

Counties have varied considerably in their methods of dealing with identification problems. At one extreme are counties in which the staff have accepted the problem as inevitable and have focused their energies on other implementation issues. At the other extreme are counties that have actively sought to rectify the problem. Two basic strategies have been used to increase the number of LEAP cases: improving internal procedures and seeking external referrals.

Internally, LEAP staff and administrators have used a variety of methods to improve the identification of LEAP-eligible teenagers within the IM unit. This includes retraining, informal meetings between LEAP and IM staff to make the LEAP program more visible, and quality control procedures such as point-in-time desk reviews of all cases. One of the most effective quality control procedures involves comparing the LEAP caseload to lists of cases coded "L" by IM staff. This process can uncover cases that were coded properly but never referred to the LEAP unit. However, such comparisons have been impeded by most county offices not being able to generate such lists because they do not have direct access to data in the state computer system. In counties that have their own computer systems, such as Cuyahoga and Hamilton counties, these efforts have been reasonably effective in identifying new LEAP-eligible cases. ODHS plans to circulate lists of "L" cases to all counties in 1991.

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[10] Income maintenance workers may become aware of pregnancies when clients obtain prenatal care covered by Medicaid. In addition, starting in the sixth month of a pregnancy, recipients are eligible for a $20 monthly pregnancy allowance (if they provide proof of pregnancy).

Supplementary methods of identifying eligible young mothers have been adopted in all counties. The public schools – especially teachers in the GRADS programs – are a primary source of external referrals to LEAP. Other important sources include health-care providers, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, and self-referrals. In many counties, LEAP staff have actively pursued methods to recruit eligible teenage mothers. For example, in Cuyahoga County, a special recruitment telephone line has been established and publicized in the community. LEAP staff in other counties have contacted potentially eligible teens themselves after reviewing birth or Medicaid records, or lists of cases from special programs operated by the human services agency. For example, LEAP staff in Lorain County have been very enterprising and diligent in their efforts to manually cross-check lists from other programs with overlapping populations against their existing LEAP caseload. Thus, although the IM referral process in not functioning as intended, many LEAP-eligible teenagers have found their way into LEAP through other channels. However, there is considerable county variation with regard to the aggressiveness with which LEAP staff seek out LEAP-eligible teenagers.

C. Consequences of Identification Problems

From the perspective of the LEAP program, there are three major consequences of failure to identify all eligible teenage parents within the IM unit. The first is that, especially during the first year of operations, there were fewer teens enrolled in the program than had originally been anticipated (although the state's overestimates also contributed to this situation). On the positive side, this meant that the LEAP caseload sizes were smaller than they otherwise would have been and that LEAP staff therefore had more opportunity to work on other start-up issues. On the negative side, many eligible teens have not been served by the program.

The second consequence is that, in those counties in which many teens have not been

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identified, the active LEAP caseload may not be representative of the total universe of eligible teens. For example, in those counties where staff have been content to allow referrals from school staff to substitute for IM-based referrals, LEAP may not be reaching as many out-of-school teens. Programmatically, this means, on the one hand, that the composition of the caseload may be somewhat skewed toward "easier" cases – that is, enrolled students, who may be more likely to comply with program requirements than school dropouts. On the other hand, since the identification problem tends to be more severe for teens who are not case heads – who are typically younger and more likely to be in school (see below) – it is possible that the program is serving a disproportionate number of out-of-school teens. Data on the characteristics of teens who have not been identified by the program are not available at this point. However, the nature of the population that *is* being served may affect future assessments of program performance, particularly in terms of county comparisons.

A third consequence of IM problems in identifying LEAP-eligible cases is that some teens are perhaps not being identified in a sufficiently timely fashion. It is possible that the financial incentives in LEAP are more effective in preventing a teenager from dropping out of school than in enticing a dropout to return to an education program. If this is true, it is important to identify LEAP-eligible cases as quickly as possible – ideally, while the pregnancy is still in progress or shortly after delivery, when case management could also have beneficial effects on health care and the teenager's transition to the parent role. Similarly, incentives may be more effective in inducing teenagers to return to school shortly after they have dropped out than after they have fallen farther behind in school.

III. Characteristics of the LEAP Caseload

By the end of December 1990, MDRC had obtained background demographic information on nearly 6,000 of the teens in the research sample. This information was obtained by LEAP case managers in interviews conducted in person or by phone just prior to random assignment. These data are summarized, by age group, in Table 3.1. Appendix A presents the same data by county.

The mean age of the LEAP sample at intake is 17.6 years. As indicated in the "sample size" line of the table, the teens are typically either 17 (29 percent) or 18 (39 percent) years of age when they start LEAP. Fewer than 5 percent of the teens are 19 years old, partly reflecting the fact that, until September 1990, 19-year-olds were not eligible for LEAP (also,

TABLE 3.1

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OHIO LEAP RESEARCH SAMPLE, BY AGE AT INTAKE

	Age					
Characteristic	Less Than or Equal to 15	16	17	18	19	All Sites
Enrolled in School	83.3%	67.9%	54.1%	34.9%	23.8%	50.6%***
Not Enrolled in School	16.7%	32.1%	45.9%	65.1%	76.2%	49.4%
Average Highest Grade Completed	8.1	9.0	9.7	9.9	10.0	9.5***
Average Number of Months Since Last Attended School (Non-Enrolled Teens Only)	8.6	10.7	15.7	20.2	26.6	18.0***
Head of Own AFDC Case	8.1%	20.1%	44.8%	88.6%	95.8%	56.3%***
On Parent's AFDC Case	83.2%	71.4%	47.5%	7.9%	1.2%	37.6%
On Another AFDC Case	8.8%	8.5%	7.6%	3.6%	3.1%	6.1%
Black	74.8%	70.6%	62.3%	53.6%	50.4%	61.1%***[a]
White	22.5%	26.4%	34.6%	43.6%	47.3%	36.1%
Hispanic	1.9%	2.3%	2.1%	2.1%	2.3%	2.1%
Single, Never Married	98.4%	95.5%	90.9%	89.2%	85.2%	91.5%***
Currently Married	1.0%	2.8%	5.4%	6.0%	9.0%	4.9%
Divorced, Separated, or Widowed	0.5%	1.7%	3.7%	4.8%	5.9%	3.6%
No Children[b]	9.5%	5.2%	2.7%	2.3%	7.0%	3.8%***
One Child	86.8%	86.2%	84.3%	76.2%	66.9%	80.9%
Two or More Children	3.8%	8.6%	13.0%	21.5%	26.1%	15.2%
Average Number of Children	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.1***
Average Age of Youngest Child (Months)	6.6	8.8	11.2	12.6	12.0	11.0***
Earnings During the Prior 12 Months	11.4%	14.8%	19.3%	17.9%	20.9%	17.2%***
No Earnings During the Prior 12 Months	88.6%	85.2%	80.7%	82.1%	79.1%	82.8%
Sample Size	599	973	1,710	2,269	260	5,811

SOURCE: MDRC Teen Parent Information Data Base.

NOTES: This table includes teens in both the treatment and control groups for whom these data were available by December 1990.

Sample sizes differ in Tables 3.1 and A.1 because of missing data.

A chi-square test or an F-test was applied to differences between age categories. Statistical significance levels are indicated as: * = 10 percent; ** = 5 percent; *** = 1 percent.

[a] For the chi-square test, these categories were collapsed into "white" and "nonwhite."

[b] In September 1990, LEAP eligibility was extended to teens who are pregnant with their first child.

a larger proportion of 19-year-olds have already received their high school diploma or GED). Based on their age, 90 percent of these teens – that is, excluding those who are under age 16 – could be mandatory for the provision in the JOBS legislation that requires teenage welfare recipients who are custodial parents to continue their schooling if they do not have a diploma or GED.[11]

According to the teens' own reports, just over half are enrolled in school (or an alternative education program) at intake.[12] For each successive age group, a larger percentage of these young mothers have dropped out of school. Although the mean highest grade completed also increases as the teens get older, it is clear that a high percentage of them are behind in grade for their age. For example, a 17-year-old student is typically in eleventh or twelfth grade, but 17-year-olds in the LEAP sample have completed less than 10 years of school, on average. It is also noteworthy that there is relatively little difference in the educational attainment of the 17-, 18-, and 19-year-olds. A year and a half has elapsed, on average, since the dropouts last attended school, with greater time having elapsed as the teens get older. This suggests a formidable challenge confronting LEAP staff and education providers working with these dropouts.

Just over half the teens are case heads. Almost all teens who are 18 or 19 have AFDC grants in their own names, while the majority of teens who are 16 or younger are on their parents' grant.[13] Teens who are on their parents' AFDC grant are twice as likely as those who are case heads to be enrolled in school (71 percent versus 36 percent, respectively – not shown in Table 3.1). While this presumably largely reflects the younger age of those on their parents' grant, it is also possible that teens living at home with their mothers are more likely to obtain support – including assistance with child care–that facilitates school attendance.

About one-third of the sample are white teens, and nearly two-thirds are black. Hispanic teens (who in this sample are primarily of Puerto Rican descent) represent only 2 percent of the LEAP sample. Black teens in the sample tend to be younger than white teens and are also more likely to be enrolled in school.

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[11] Strictly speaking, the provision does not legally apply to teens who are enrolled in school, although, of course, it would if they dropped out.

[12] The school enrollment information is based on self-reports, which are not verified at the time the intake forms are completed. Therefore, there is likely to be a certain amount of error in the enrollment information presented here, probably in the direction of overreporting current enrollment.

[13] There is no minimum age for opening an AFDC case in Ohio. However, in most cases, teenage parents open their own case at age 18, when they can no longer be counted as dependents on their mother's grant.

The vast majority of teens in every age group have never been married, although older teens are somewhat more likely to have gotten married. For example, under 5 percent of those 16 or younger have married, while 11 percent of the 18-year-olds have done so.

The majority of teens (81 percent) have given birth to only one child, but older teens are more likely to have had an early repeat pregnancy. About one out of five of those who are 18 or older have two or more children. Only a small percentage of teens (3.8 percent) are pregnant with their first child at intake, but it should be recalled that until September 1990, these teens were not eligible for LEAP. The LEAP teens are typically caring for very young children: the average age of the teens' youngest child is 11 months at intake, underscoring their need for child care (notably for infants) in order to comply with LEAP requirements.

Fewer than one out of five of the teens in the sample had any earnings from employment in the 12 months prior to intake. Teens who are 17 years old are more likely to have earnings in the previous year than teens who are 18, possibly reflecting the fact that the older teens are more likely to have two or more children.

IV. Conclusions

Despite problems of identification, approximately 7,000 eligible teens had entered the LEAP research sample through the end of 1990 in the evaluation counties. Information provided through intake forms confirms that the young parents enrolling in LEAP are a disadvantaged group that is at high risk of long-term welfare receipt. They are typically young, unmarried, minority women, many of whom have dropped out of school. Those who are no longer enrolled have typically been out of school for long periods of time and have completed, on average, only 9.5 years of education. Almost all are caring for children who are still infants. These characteristics highlight the magnitude of the challenge facing LEAP staff in encouraging regular school attendance among these teenage parents.

Identifying teens who are eligible for LEAP has been difficult and subject to error in almost all counties, particularly at the outset of program implementation but to some extent throughout the first 18 months of operation. IM workers are responsible for manually identifying LEAP cases and making referrals to LEAP staff but, for a variety of reasons, have not been completely successful in accomplishing these tasks. This suggests that large numbers of eligible teens have not been served by the program to date.

Errors of identification have been especially severe for those LEAP-eligible teens who are dependent on their mother's grant. In an effort to serve more teens, LEAP staff have often sought referrals from alternative sources, most typically from GRADS teachers. A few counties have aggressively pursued additional teens, often by manually cross-checking lists of referrals to other programs that serve overlapping populations. The need to resort to such methods suggests that existing systems and procedures are not equipped to effectively carry out the identification process. The LEAP experiences suggest the following:

- Identifying eligible teenagers using manual procedures requires the development of explicit rules and procedures, extensive training of IM workers, administrative emphasis on the importance of accurate identification, and implementation of tight quality control procedures. However, manual procedures alone are unlikely to be foolproof, especially in big counties in which large numbers of IM workers are relied upon to make referrals.

- Automated methods of identifying LEAP-eligible cases are likely to facilitate the identification process, especially given the current demands on IM workers. However, this will be the case only if the system is set up to indicate the relationships among all case members. Even with automated systems, manual quality control procedures may well prove necessary.

- When errors of identification through the IM unit are made, alternative sources of information can be used to recruit eligible teenagers. However, heavy reliance on sources such as referrals from schools may result in the underenrollment of specific groups of eligible teenagers.

CHAPTER 4

LINKAGES BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCIES

Education providers play a central role in the LEAP program. In the short term, schools and ABE/GED programs must supply the attendance information that triggers LEAP's financial incentives. Then, if LEAP is successful in fostering regular school attendance, the quality of the education services teens receive will critically affect their educational attainment and, eventually, economic self-sufficiency.

Since LEAP was initiated by the welfare system, one of the key tasks facing program staff during the early implementation period has been to develop institutional linkages with local schools and other education agencies. In many counties, relationships of the kind needed to operate LEAP did not exist before the program was implemented.

This chapter discusses organizational linkages between human services and education agencies. It begins with a brief description of the key education resources that are available to LEAP teens and then examines the process of building institutional relationships. The next three sections identify a number of obstacles that have been encountered and some promising strategies to promote effective collaboration. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of another set of institutional linkages – those between human services and Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) agencies – that have been developed to gain access to summer jobs for LEAP teens.

I. Existing Education Resources

Chapter 1 noted that the LEAP program does not, for the most part, deliver services. Rather, the program focuses on encouraging and assisting teen parents to attend school regularly, and relies on the education system to serve them once there. This section briefly discusses the types of schools and programs that are typically available to LEAP teens in the research counties and then focuses on the diversity of resources across school districts and the implications of this variation for LEAP.

A. Available Options

The education options and support programs that are potentially available to LEAP teens are, for the most part, fairly extensive. In general, LEAP's target population can choose from the following education alternatives:

- **High school or junior high school.** The high school/junior high school option includes regular public high schools and junior high schools, as well as parochial and other private schools.
- **High school alternative programs.** These include a broad range of special programs leading to a high school diploma, including vocational schools, schools for pregnant teens, evening schools, and alternative school programs, which often have flexible hours and stress individualized instruction.
- **ABE/GED programs.** Adult Basic Education programs preparing students to take the GED exam require weekly time commitments of as few as two hours and as many as 20 hours. These programs, typically serving adults, are offered in a variety of settings and may be linked to job training, work experience opportunities, or other special programs.

In all of the evaluation counties, public school districts are virtually the only providers of traditional and alternative high school diploma programs to LEAP teens; very few teens attend private or parochial schools. School districts' adult education offices are also the key ABE/GED providers in most areas, although these programs are also operated by other agencies such as JTPA, the Job Corps, community colleges, and several types of community-based organizations.

Many school districts also provide a variety of special services for at-risk students. By far the most important program from LEAP's perspective is the Graduation, Reality and Dual-Role Skills (GRADS) program, an Ohio Department of Education vocational home economics program that funds and trains home economics teachers to work specifically with pregnant and parenting teens. GRADS currently serves more than 8,000 students in more than 500 high schools, junior high schools, and joint vocational schools statewide. GRADS teachers conduct classes on health care, parenting skills, child development, decisionmaking and relationship skills, resource management, career exploration and employability development, job search, and other topics. A key objective of the program is to prevent young parents from dropping out of school.

In many schools, GRADS meets daily for one class period; in others, it meets less frequently. GRADS is offered as an elective course, and students may remain enrolled in the program for up to two years. To varying degrees, GRADS teachers also maintain contact outside of class with pregnant and parenting teens who are not enrolled in their classes, as well as with those who are. Teachers routinely make home visits and visit students in the hospital just after they give birth. For students who are enrolled in GRADS, teachers monitor attendance and often follow up with home visits when students are absent for several days without an excuse. In addition, GRADS teachers act as advocates for pregnant and parenting teens in their schools and in the community.

GRADS has played an important role in the implementation of LEAP. Although not all LEAP teens are active in GRADS in schools where it is available, and a substantial proportion of GRADS students are not eligible for LEAP, the populations served by the two programs do overlap. As will be discussed further below, GRADS teachers have helped to develop and maintain the institutional relationship between their schools and the LEAP program. In particular, they have frequently served as formal or informal school liaisons to LEAP. GRADS teachers have also provided on-site contact with LEAP enrollees which, as discussed in Chapter 2, can be a valuable extension of LEAP case management. Given the objectives and content of the GRADS program, GRADS is an important complement to LEAP.[1]

Nine urban school districts also participate in the Graduation, Occupation and Living Skills (GOALS) program, which works with young parents (ages 16 to 30) who have dropped out of school. GOALS, an Ohio Department of Education vocational home economics program, provides classroom instruction in personal development, career exploration and employment development, parenting, and resource management, and is generally linked to an ABE/GED program operated by the school district. The program also helps participants enter occupational training and work experience programs.

Finally, many schools and school districts also operate special dropout prevention or dropout recovery programs, offer work experience opportunities, provide tutors or home instruction, or have special linkages with local employers or community organizations to offer a variety of school-based services to students.

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[1] GRADS has been selected for inclusion in the National Diffusion Network (NDN), a clearinghouse for educationally superior programs, administered by the U.S. Department of Education. The Ohio Department of Education has received a four-year grant from the NDN to disseminate the GRADS program to other states.

B. Variation in Available Options

As discussed in Chapter 3, LEAP serves a diverse clientele, ranging from 15- to 16-year-olds who have never dropped out of school to 18- to 19-year-olds who have been out of school for several years and are far behind the appropriate grade level for their age. The experiences of previous programs serving at-risk youth suggest that, particularly for teens who have dropped out, opportunities to enroll in alternatives to traditional high school may be critical. Although support programs such as GRADS can help make the traditional high school environment more hospitable to pregnant and parenting students, LEAP staff report that many dropouts are resistant to returning to the same schools in which they failed in the past, especially if they would now be placed in classes with much younger students. Alternative options are a virtual necessity for 19-year-olds.

The quality, diversity, extent, and flexibility of education services all vary by school district. Table 4.1 describes the key education resources available in each of the evaluation counties. As the table indicates, most LEAP teens are concentrated in the largest city in each county. Thus, the table includes background information about the public school district in each of these cities, as well as data on each of the three major types of programs teens utilize. As the table illustrates, teens in some districts have a range of high school, alternative high school, and ABE/GED options to choose from. The availability of GRADS also varies. The existence of a range of programs means that teens have more opportunities to find an option that is attractive and convenient.

A variety of education options is available in virtually all large city school districts, although some of the most attractive options are often oversubscribed and consequently unavailable to some teens who would prefer them. In Cleveland, for example, LEAP teens attend about 80 different programs, including 12 regular high schools, 9 of which have GRADS programs; several of the city's 22 junior high schools; several alternative and magnet schools operated by the Cleveland Public Schools; and ABE/GED programs operated by the public school system, local colleges, JTPA, the Job Corps, and numerous community organizations.

Some small districts also offer many alternatives. For example, in the Zanesville School District in Muskingum County, options include Zanesville High School, which has both a

TABLE 4.1

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN THE RESEARCH COUNTIES

County	Number of School Districts in County	Percent of LEAP Caseload Residing in Largest City in County[a]	Number of High Schools in Primary School District[b]	Graduation Rate in Primary School District[c]	Percent of Students in Primary District Receiving AFDC[d]	Availability of Alternative High School Diploma Programs in Primary District[e]	Availability of ABE/GED Programs in Primary District[f]		Number of GRADS Units in County[g]
							School District	Non-Public School	
Cuyahoga	31	89 (Cleveland)	16	49.1	64.0	Yes	Multiple sites	Multiple sites	21
Franklin	16	96 (Columbus)	16	47.6	33.3	Yes	Multiple sites	Multiple sites	12
Hamilton	22	99 (Cincinnati)	10	54.4	39.0	Yes	Multiple sites	Multiple sites	15
Jefferson	5	52 (Steubenville)	1	N/A	38.8	Yes	One site[h]	None	3
Lawrence	7	40 (Ironton)	1	82.2	32.4	No	Multiple sites	None	4
Lorain	15	59 (Lorain)	4	62.1	33.3	Yes	Multiple sites	None	5
Lucas	8	98 (Toledo)	9	52.6	34.1	Yes	Multiple sites	None[i]	8
Montgomery	16	90 (Dayton)	6	53.4	45.4	Yes	Multiple sites	Multiple sites	5
Muskingum	6	76 (Zanesville)	1	75.3	25.7	Yes	Multiple sites	One site	3
Stark	17	57 (Canton)	2	74.3	32.8	No	Multiple sites	Multiple sites	7
Summit	17	88 (Akron)	8	73.4	32.8	Yes	Multiple sites	Multiple sites	6
Trumbull	21	72 (Warren)	1	65.0	37.3	No	Multiple sites	None	3

(continued)

TABLE 4.1 (continued)

SOURCES: Ohio Department of Education, 1988 (see references); Children's Defense Fund-Ohio and Junior Leagues of Ohio, 1989 (see references); MDRC Teen Parent Data Base through December 1990; and interviews with county LEAP staff.

NOTES: [a]The vast majority of LEAP teens residing in the largest cities in the research counties are within the city school district. There are two school districts in the City of Cincinnati. In Lorain County, there are also a substantial number of LEAP teens (31 percent of the county's total) in the City of Elyria. In Lawrence County, teens residing in the City of Ironton may attend the Rock Hill public schools.

[b]This includes alternative high school diploma programs and magnet high schools in addition to comprehensive high schools. The numbers do not include adult education or vocational centers.

[c]1987 figures.

[d]1989 figures.

[e]This excludes night high schools and joint vocational schools. The primary districts in all of the research counties have one or both of these options available.

[f]Information is based on programs attended by LEAP teens; there may be more programs available than reported on the table. Non-public school providers include JTPA programs, community-based organizations, community colleges, and proprietary training schools.

[g]Figures are for the 1989-90 school year. A GRADS unit is equivalent to one GRADS teacher. Some GRADS teachers cover more than one school, and some schools have more than one GRADS teacher.

[h]The Steubenville school district offers ABE/GED classes at only one site. However, other school districts in the county operate ABE/GED programs within Steubenville.

[i]The Lucas County LEAP program strongly counsels LEAP teens in Toledo to attend only ABE/GED programs operated by Toledo Public Schools. However, there are some non-public school ABE/GED programs available in the city.

traditional high school program and an alternative program for teens who have difficulty in a traditional classroom setting; a regional vocational school, which operates a vocational/high school program leading to a high school diploma and an ABE/GED program; and two ABE/GED programs funded by JTPA, one a computer-based program and the other a program combining GED preparation with employability development classes for school dropouts. In addition, the high school has a GRADS program as well as a WAVE (Work, Achievement, Values, and Education) program that emphasizes self-esteem and targets potential dropouts; the vocational school has GRADS and an on-site child care center; and one of the JTPA programs offers a range of employment-related and support services.

In some other school districts, however, options are much more limited. For example, in some areas, teens have only the high school (and, perhaps, the vocational school) option until they are 18 years old. This is because alternative high school diploma programs are not always available, particularly in rural areas of Ohio, and, as discussed below, because school districts are restricted by state law from serving most students under 18 years old in ABE/GED programs. In addition, while ABE/GED programs are available in all counties, the number and location of sites and the differences in hours and instructional approach all tend to be more limited outside the big cities. Finally, it is important to note that many districts do not have a GRADS program and that, in districts that do have GRADS, the program is limited in size and is often not available in all high schools and junior high schools.

This variation in school options and special programs has many implications for the operation of LEAP and contributes to the diversity among county LEAP programs. In areas where attractive alternatives are not available, dropouts may be less willing to comply with the LEAP mandate, despite the financial penalties. In addition, given the role GRADS teachers play in the implementation of LEAP in schools in which they are on the faculty, the challenge to LEAP is much greater in schools that do not have a GRADS programs. Under these circumstances, there may be no one at a school who is very familiar with LEAP and who has daily contact with LEAP teens. Thus, the job for LEAP – in terms of institutional issues and case management tasks – is substantially greater.

However, LEAP, as it is presently structured, must work with what the education systems in various communities provide. Thus, in a very important sense, the effectiveness of the overall LEAP treatment depends on the local school district and is beyond the control of the

Department of Human Services. LEAP can play an advocate's role vis-a-vis schools, as the program has in some instances, but it has very little leverage with school administrators, since the program has no resources either to pay for particular education services or to fund changes or innovations in schools that are thought to be appropriate for LEAP teens.

II. Building Linkages Between Welfare and Education Agencies

Successful implementation of the LEAP program requires closer coordination and greater communication between human services agencies and education providers than typically existed prior to the beginning of the program. Specifically, these agencies must develop procedures to regularly exchange school attendance information, a task that had not previously been attempted in any county for high school students. The process of building effective institutional linkages has been complex and challenging, particularly in larger cities. In addition to the typical issues that emerge whenever large systems attempt to collaborate, several specific factors have affected this process in the LEAP research counties. These include:

- **Tight implementation timetable.** The compressed implementation schedule for LEAP affected the process of building institutional linkages in much the same way that it affected the planning process within county human services departments. There was little time for LEAP staff to meet with school officials to introduce the program and discuss attendance reporting procedures prior to the date on which the program's mandate took effect.

- **Limited incentives for schools to cooperate.** As noted earlier, LEAP depends heavily on cooperation from schools and school districts. However, from the schools' perspective, aside from the general objective of improving attendance and reducing dropouts, there is little built into the model to promote this collaboration. The program includes no special funding for schools, although higher enrollment generates additional funding through normal school reimbursement formulas. In addition, education officials were usually not invited to participate in its planning.

- **Different organizational structures.** Local school districts and individual schools operate with considerably more autonomy than do county human services agencies, which themselves exercise local discretion in carrying out state policies. Thus, the role of the state education and welfare agencies, the flow of information through the two systems, and the issues that arise in each school district are all quite different.

Despite these obstacles, counties and schools have made substantial progress in developing these linkages. As will be discussed below, attendance reporting procedures are currently in place in all counties, although they do not always function effectively. In addition, several counties and school districts have gone beyond the linkages necessary to operate the basic LEAP model to address a wider set of issues affecting the teens. This section explores the process of building institutional linkages at the state and county levels, and discusses how these relationships function in practice.

A. State-level Linkages

As discussed in Chapter 1, LEAP was conceived and developed by the Ohio Department of Human Services. The Ohio Department of Education (ODE), while generally supportive of the program, was not directly involved in its planning.[2] This is not altogether surprising, given the nature of LEAP and the structure of the education system. Since LEAP does not, by itself, attempt to change or reform the education system, most of LEAP's planning effort was focused on internal human services issues. ODHS staff were mostly interested in informing education officials about the program and ensuring that attendance information could be obtained.[3] In addition, since LEAP is operated at the county level, and local education agencies function with a high degree of autonomy, the role of the state education agency would probably have been limited under any circumstances. Finally, it is important to remember that the LEAP population (which totals less than 15,000 statewide), while presumably of great interest to education administrators who focus on the dropout problem, nevertheless represents a small proportion of Ohio's two million school students. Thus, from a state perspective, LEAP is one of many initiatives potentially affecting Ohio's school population.

Partly because the departments played such disparate roles in designing the program, ODE and ODHS proceeded differently when it came time to inform local agencies about

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[2] This is typical of other education initiatives for welfare recipients. For further discussion focusing on other programs, see Pauly, Long, and Martinson (forthcoming).

[3] In early 1990, ODHS and ODE entered into an interagency agreement to "exchange information necessary to operate the LEAP program." This agreement covered both necessary attendance data and other information "concerning appropriate school programs for and progress in school by LEAP Program participants." ODE agreed to request that schools provide the necessary information to county human services agencies, and ODHS agreed to protect the confidentiality of the data.

LEAP. As discussed in Chapter 1, ODHS provided detailed information about the program to county human services agencies throughout early 1989, and solicited comments and recommendations from county staff. In contrast, school district superintendents were notified about LEAP in March 1989 via a two-page letter – printed on ODHS letterhead – signed by the Director of ODHS and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The letter depicted LEAP as a joint undertaking of the two departments, briefly described the attendance reporting that would be required, and urged superintendents to "do whatever you can to nurture the relationship [with the local human services agency], and to make sure the project succeeds." The letter was accompanied by a brief memorandum from the State Superintendent, encouraging districts to cooperate with the program. In September 1989, the State Superintendent mailed a second packet of information to district superintendents; principals of middle, junior high, and high schools; and superintendents of joint vocational school districts. This mailing included a copy of the March letter, a sample School Absence Report and a description of the form, and a brief memorandum from the State Superintendent stating that ODE had agreed to request that each school provide the necessary attendance data to county human services agencies. These were the only official, statewide communications from ODE to school districts regarding LEAP.[4]

Disparities in the style and substance of state-local communications could be expected, given the structural differences between the education and welfare systems. However, as will be discussed below, many county human services staff were not accustomed to the decentralized nature of the education system and assumed that parallel communications efforts had occurred in the two systems.

B. Developing Local Linkages

Because school districts in Ohio received little information about LEAP from the state education agency, county LEAP staff needed to inform local schools and other education providers during the spring and summer of 1989 about the program and the attendance reporting that would be required. ODHS offered limited guidance in this area and, in most counties, there was little history of collaboration on which to build.[5]

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[4] It is important to note that state supervisors in ODE programs such as GRADS and GOALS have provided substantially more information on LEAP to local teachers and staff in these programs. In some cases, principals and other school staff have learned about LEAP through GRADS teachers.

LEAP staff often began by arranging meetings with superintendents and other district-level officials. Staff usually focused their early efforts on the largest district in the county and reached out to the smaller ones when necessary (that is, once they discovered that a LEAP teen was attending a school in the district). This process was much simpler in small counties than in large urban centers. In some of the smaller counties, LEAP staff knew the superintendents personally or invited all superintendents in the county to attend a LEAP orientation meeting. One county sent a questionnaire to each school district in the county seeking the names of contacts for attendance information. In the larger cities, such steps were less feasible, and LEAP staff often had difficulty determining where within the school district organizational structure to initiate contacts.

For the most part, the response from school districts was positive. Before LEAP began, some observers had predicted that schools would object to the notion of reporting attendance data that could trigger welfare grant changes. In fact, some school officials did raise objections to the concept of "paying teen parents to go to school" or to the administrative burden of attendance reporting. Others noted that specific LEAP rules, which had been developed at the state level, did not mesh well with local school policies.[6] Overall, however, most were glad to accept help working with a challenging population, and were willing to provide the necessary attendance information. Districts also looked forward to obtaining additional state funding for each LEAP participant who enrolled in school.[7]

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[5] Although ODHS provided little direction to counties regarding linkages with particular school districts, ODHS and ODE staff did offer more general guidance. For example, in September 1989, a team consisting of ODHS welfare reform staff and ODE vocational education and adult education staff attended a national conference focusing on interagency linkages and developed an Action Plan for Ohio. Following this conference, the team surveyed education and human services officials throughout the state to assess the status of local linkages. After the survey, 15 local linkage teams, including both human services and education officials, attended a meeting that replicated the earlier national conference, and each team developed a local Action Plan. A report describing these efforts, as well as examples of strong local linkages and typical barriers to successful collaboration, was circulated to all counties in 1990.

[6] For the most part, school officials felt that LEAP's attendance and exemption policies were too lenient. For example, some schools noted that local policies for excusing absences after the birth of a child were much less generous than LEAP's three-month exemption.

Once district officials had agreed in principle to the notion of attendance reporting, it was necessary to develop specific procedures. However, identifying the individuals who would actually be responsible for compiling data was not always straightforward and, in some cases, was accompanied by considerable confusion. In a few districts, LEAP or school staff recommended that attendance reporting be handled primarily at the district level. This usually simplified the process somewhat. However, in most districts, LEAP staff found that, owing to the nature of attendance records, it would be necessary to work with individual schools and programs to obtain monthly reports.

When LEAP staff approached principals and other school-level officials, they often found that information about LEAP had not flowed from the district level to individual schools, or at least to the staff responsible for attendance records. This meant that county staff could not presume that school-level officials were aware of the program or of the expectation that the school would provide regular attendance information to the department, even if the district had officially approved this process. As noted above, LEAP staff, who had little experience working with the decentralized education system, were often not prepared for how little school officials knew about the program. Communication during this period was further hampered by the tight LEAP implementation schedule; by the time the program regulations (and attendance rules) had been made final, many school staff were on summer vacation. When they returned, they were often preoccupied with preparations for the start of the school year.

In several school districts, the tight schedule and initial uncertainties on both sides conspired to prevent early direct communication between LEAP staff and the school staff who would ultimately be responsible for compiling attendance data. This severely hindered attendance reporting during the first few months of the school year. In some cases, neither set of players understood the problem; LEAP staff thought that the schools understood their role but were not cooperating, and school officials, who had not been informed about their role, did not know why they had received reporting forms from ODHS. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that ODHS did not include any explanation or instructions with the forms for the first several months of the program. As with many other issues, these problems were much more likely to cause serious disruption in urban areas, where teens are dispersed among many programs, some of which serve dozens of LEAP students. In the smaller counties, where there are fewer providers and no single school serves more than a handful of LEAP teens, attendance reporting could be handled informally until regular systems were established.

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[7] Districts are eligible to receive additional state funding for disadvantaged students; the allocation of these funds to districts is based partly on the proportion of their students who come from families on AFDC.

Although problems persist in some school districts, attendance reporting systems gradually improved in most counties during the first school year of LEAP operations as procedures were refined and staff in both human services agencies and schools became more familiar with the process. A later section of this chapter discusses the attendance reporting process in more detail.

C. Examples of Broader Collaboration

As might be expected, most contact between county human services agencies and local education agencies in all counties concerns attendance reporting. Thus, the key points of contact between county and school staff are usually determined by the system that has been developed to obtain attendance information. However, in several counties, LEAP and school staff have attempted to go beyond attendance reporting to develop joint strategies to assist teens in other ways. The types of issues that are addressed appear to be related to the structure devised to handle attendance reporting.

In a few of the research counties, the relationship between the human services department and the primary school district has remained highly centralized. This is the case, for example, in Lucas and Summit counties, where centralized attendance reporting systems have been developed with the Toledo and Akron school districts, respectively. In each of these cities, one district-level official has been designated as the official liaison to LEAP and is responsible for compiling attendance information and dealing with all other issues. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Akron linkage is formalized through a contract under which LEAP pays the salary of the school district liaison.

A centralized relationship of this kind can facilitate district-wide coordination by standardizing attendance reporting and minimizing the number of people with whom LEAP staff must maintain contact. In addition, these arrangements provide LEAP staff with easy access to district officials when questions or complaints about district policy arise. For example, in Lucas County, where relations with the Toledo Public Schools are channeled primarily through the district office that oversees GRADS, county staff have been able to raise questions about such issues as district policies for releasing teen parents from compulsory attendance. Finally, having ready access to a district-level staff person can provide LEAP with a certain degree of "clout" when issues arise in specific schools.

However, in these centralized arrangements, there is typically little communication between LEAP case managers and school staff who have daily contact with teens. This makes it more difficult for LEAP staff to obtain information about teens' school experiences beyond basic daily attendance, and to work with school staff to develop joint strategies to assist teens with special problems. Although LEAP rules do not require case managers to monitor teens' school progress, class attendance, and grades, or to work with school staff to address problems, many case managers feel that these activities contribute to the program's overall goal by giving them a broader understanding of their clients' situations.

In most districts, the relationship is far more decentralized, with most contact occurring at the school level. In most of these cases, there is no formal district-level liaison to LEAP, and no easy way for LEAP staff to access appropriate district officials. In these districts, LEAP staff must develop and monitor attendance reporting mechanisms with many individuals, and must learn different attendance rules and recording systems. Although this is possible, it can be challenging and time-consuming, particularly in large cities, where LEAP teens attend dozens of education programs. Predictably, the most typical points of contact in schools are attendance officers or other staff assigned to compile data for LEAP.[8] County staff often speak to these individuals by phone regarding late attendance reports or questions on reports submitted.

However, in a number of schools, LEAP staff have developed strong informal relationships with other school-level staff. These linkages, typically facilitated by GRADS teachers, have allowed the two agencies to address a broader set of issues. As discussed above, GRADS complements LEAP case management services because, in addition to teaching a specialized curriculum for young parents, GRADS teachers follow up when students are absent, conduct home visits, and serve as advocates for pregnant and parenting teens within their schools and communities. In many cases, the GRADS program provided an existing network that facilitated acceptance and integration of LEAP into the school. Many GRADS teachers have voluntarily emerged as informal liaisons to LEAP; they have followed up on attendance reporting problems, informed other staff about LEAP, referred potentially eligible teens to the LEAP program, arranged for LEAP presentations and assessments to take place at the schools, and/or worked with case managers to develop strategies to assist particular teens. In schools that do not have a GRADS program or where GRADS teachers have not assumed an active role, LEAP staff have typically had a more difficult time establishing a broader relationship.

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[8] In some schools, GRADS teachers have been assigned (or volunteered) to handle attendance reporting for LEAP teens.

Cuyahoga County's decision to station LEAP staff nearly full time in six Cleveland high schools (see Chapter 2) is another example of an attempt to build a strong school-based linkage that will both extend the reach of LEAP case management and cement ties between school and program staff.

III. Issues and Obstacles

As noted earlier, schools and school districts have generally been supportive of LEAP, and much progress has been made in developing institutional linkages. However, as is likely to occur whenever two large systems attempt to collaborate, specific rules, policies, organizational capacities, and standard operating procedures do not always mesh. In addition, poor communications and incomplete or incorrect perceptions can create misunderstandings about the appropriate roles and responsibilities of each system. In many cases, these problems are only exposed after implementation begins. This section discusses several areas in which incongruities or miscommunication between human services and education agencies have hindered the implementation of LEAP.

A. Unaddressed Policy Issues

Local human services and school staff knew little about the rules and mode of operation of the other system when LEAP began. Thus, the implementation process exposed several areas in which policies do not mesh or explicit policies were never developed to address important issues. These open questions have sometimes hindered collaboration. Examples include:

- Many LEAP staff expected school officials to assess returning dropouts to determine an appropriate placement. While this occurs in some districts, LEAP case managers often play the key role in counseling teens on education options – usually without the benefit of education testing, a review of the teen's educational record, or detailed knowledge of available alternatives.

- There has been uncertainty on both sides about who should determine the number of hours a LEAP teen is scheduled for ABE/GED classes. LEAP rules require teens to attend school full time, but do not specify a minimum number of hours. Most counties accept almost any arrangement, including one two-hour session per week, as sufficient to meet the requirement. While some ABE/GED programs operate a specific number of days and hours per week for all students, others have a more individualized approach and allow students to set their own schedules. Many LEAP staff initially expected the ABE/GED providers to make an assessment of the number of hours per week that would be most appropriate. However, some of the providers question why the human services department does not specify the number of hours expected (as they do in the JOBS program). In most counties, the teen parent generally makes this decision with input from both education and LEAP staff, and is often influenced by the location of the classes and the time of day or night they are offered.

- Some school staff question whether bonuses should be given without taking into consideration the student's progress in school. While some LEAP staff try to talk with teens about their grades, others feel that it is the schools' responsibility to monitor and facilitate the teen's progress once LEAP staff have helped persuade her to attend school.

- Some school officials feel that the human services department should be directly responsible for collecting attendance information or should pay for school personnel to collect it.

While some of these issues have been addressed by LEAP and school staff in relation to individual teens, there have been few attempts to address them more systematically.

B. Issues Affecting Teens' Access to Education Programs

The first part of this chapter discussed the potential importance of non-high school alternatives for LEAP teens. Although several alternatives exist in most school districts, a variety of factors (such as the size of the programs) can restrict teens' ability to use them. In some cases, this problem is exacerbated by school policies that are designed to promote good attendance and keep students in school, but have the unintended side effect of limiting teens' access to desirable alternative programs. This situation, another example of policies that do not mesh, is particularly likely to affect teens who are not in school or who are behind in grade level when they enter LEAP. The following reality-based scenario is instructive:

> A dropout teen parent is identified by the LEAP program several months into the school year and is required to return to school. However, the local school system has a policy of automatically failing students who miss more than 20 days of a year-long course and 10 days of a semester course. This means that the young woman is required to attend school but, since she has already missed too many days, cannot earn any credits for the remainder of the semester or for any year-long courses (which are generally required for graduation) until the following school year. If she chooses not to attend school, she will be sanctioned by the LEAP program and possibly taken to court for truancy. Moreover, in some schools, if she is far behind in grade level, the school principal may not be willing to place her in classes with younger students. This "Catch-22" situation can be exacerbated if the teen is under 18 years old and the school district will not allow her to attend ABE/GED classes as an alternative to high school.

As a result of the unfortunate convergence of several education policies and the LEAP mandate, a teen can be faced with a situation in which both the education and welfare systems require her to attend school but she does not have access to an education option through which she can make progress toward a diploma or GED. While the above scenario is an extreme example of multiple barriers facing a single teen, it is an accurate picture of the challenges that many teens can face in attempting to comply with the LEAP mandate. As might be expected, the existence and implementation of these policies vary from district to district, and even among particular schools. Once again, in most cases, the implications of these policies did not become apparent until after the LEAP mandate took effect.

The remainder of this section focuses on policies, such as those briefly mentioned in the above scenario, that affect teen parents' education choices and ability to earn credit while trying to comply with the LEAP mandate.

1. Age restrictions for ABE/GED programs. The education policy that has most profoundly affected teens' experiences in the LEAP program is the state rule that makes teens under 18 years old ineligible for ABE programs. This restriction arises from the interaction of federal rules governing ABE funding and Ohio's compulsory education law. Specifically, the federal Adult Education Act provides funding only to programs serving adults and defines "adult" as an individual who is over 16 years old or beyond the age of compulsory school attendance under state law. Since compulsory school attendance extends until age 18 in Ohio, services provided to 16- and 17-year-olds are considered ineligible for Adult Education Act funding. The only statutory exception to Ohio's compulsory school attendance law that would allow 16- or 17-year-olds to enroll in ABE programs is full-time employment authorized by an Age and Schooling Certificate. These certificates are issued by district superintendents and are supposed to be verified by ABE providers for students under age 18.

Age restrictions on ABE/GED programs are largely intended to keep children in school. However, strict application of this rule can drastically limit the education options open to younger LEAP teens. Teen parents who are receiving welfare are not likely to be working full time and thus to be eligible for an Age and Schooling Certificate. A teen parent who has dropped out of school or who is behind in grade level and is not permitted to attend an ABE/GED program may be forced by the LEAP mandate to attend an education institution in which she has already failed (and which may require many years of attendance before she can earn her diploma). This places the young parent in a difficult situation, and it does not necessarily promote the goals of either LEAP or the education system. The demographic data presented in Chapter 3 illustrate that a substantial proportion of LEAP teens are out of school, under 18, and behind in grade level.

The effect of the age requirement on ABE/GED eligibility in a particular location depends on several factors:

- **Public school ABE/GED providers' application of the rule.** The age restriction on ABE/GED programs is not universally applied. There are providers of all types that are willing to accept 16- and 17-year-olds as long as they have been officially released from their "home" school. Some will accept all 16- and 17-year-olds who have been released, while others will only accept "hardship cases," in which a youth has been out of school for a period of time or is far behind in grade level for her age.[9]

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[9] There appears to be some question in providers' minds about whether the age restriction applies to state ABE dollars as well as to federal funds under the Adult Education Act. Most public school ABE/GED providers operate with both types of funding. It also appears that until the implementation of the LEAP program, many ABE/GED providers were not fully aware of the age restriction on Adult Education funds. The major reason seems to be that, prior to a 1987 rule change, youths under age 19 were not permitted to take the GED test and were not seeking out or being accepted into ABE/GED programs. The rule change enabled teens under age 19 to take the test before their high school class graduates (if the teen's parent or guardian requests it and the school superintendent approves). Subsequently, more teens sought to enroll in ABE/GED classes. LEAP implementation appears to have increased the number of teens under age 18 who are seeking ABE/GED services.

- **The availability of non-public school ABE/GED providers in the community.** Public school districts are more likely than non-public school providers – such as JTPA or community-based organizations – to apply the age restriction for ABE/GED. This seems to be in part because non-public school providers often have sources of funding apart from Adult Education Act funds – such as JTPA training money and foundation contributions – with which to operate their ABE/GED programs. Therefore, they are not restricted by the state rule. Also, because they operate outside the public education system, these providers may not be as closely monitored as are school providers, even when they use Adult Education Act funding. Some school districts operate ABE/GED programs for younger teens as part of alternative and/or vocational training programs (such as joint vocational school programs) in which the teens are still part of the school system. Most of these programs are not funded with Adult Education Act funds and thus can operate outside the age restriction.

- **The school district's willingness to release teens under 18 years of age from school.** Although the only statutory exception to the compulsory attendance law is full-time work (which includes being in the military), school principals and superintendents in many districts interpret this loosely and release teens for other reasons. These include:

    - the teen is a parent and can be considered to be working full time taking care of her child;

    - the student is far behind in grade level or is a disciplinary problem, and the student, parent, teachers, and principal agree that ABE/GED is a better option for the student (and the student has demonstrated that she will sign up for such a program in lieu of high school); or

    - the teen has simply stopped attending school.

  In some cases, teens have gotten a release by telling school officials that they are going to get a job. In many districts, the schools have been willing to release teens from compulsory attendance, but the district's ABE/GED programs have not accepted them if they were under 18 years old. Although there is no overall pattern to these policies for granting releases, principals in suburban and rural areas seem to be less likely to authorize releases.

In a community in which the public school district is the only ABE/GED provider and strictly applies the age restriction rule, a young teen parent may have no choice but to enroll in the regular high school she has already stopped attending, or face sanctioning by the LEAP program. This is more likely to occur in rural areas and small cities, since urban areas generally have many ABE/GED providers and alternative education options.

With the implementation of LEAP and other education-oriented welfare reform initiatives, it appears that more young people are seeking ABE/GED services. Some ABE/GED providers who initially accepted teens under age 18 have tightened their eligibility requirements in response to warnings from the Ohio Department of Education concerning the age restriction rules. As the demand for ABE/GED slots increases with the implementation of JOBS, LEAP, and the General Assistance education program, some school districts are moving to enforce the age limit more strictly, since they can use it as a way to ration slots. To date, the implications of the age restriction for LEAP have not been addressed at the state level.

2. Other Factors Several other factors also limit the ability of some teens to access education programs. These include:

- **Course credit policies.** As noted above, some school districts and schools have policies that make students ineligible to earn course credit if they enroll after a certain point in the school year or miss a specified number of class periods within a marking period or semester. These rules appear to be becoming more common in Ohio as schools attempt to address high rates of absenteeism. In many cases, the rules are based purely on attendance and not on the student's ability to make up missed work. Typically, these rules allow 7 to 10 absences in a marking period (about nine weeks), counting both excused and unexcused absences (although usually just the latter). In some cases, the absence "clock" starts at the beginning of the semester even if the teen has not yet registered for school. Some schools have review or appeal committees that consider cases where students feel that the failing grade is not justified. These rules can make regular school a less attractive option for teens returning mid-year and for those experiencing attendance problems, since they may not be able to earn credit. They affected a substantial number of LEAP teens during the first year of program operations, since many teens were not informed of the school attendance mandate until well into the fall semester.

- **Restricted eligibility for alternative programs.** There are often restrictions on eligibility for special programs, and some alternatives may not be attractive to teen mothers. For example, many districts have night high schools in which students can take accelerated classes. This means that a student can graduate with his or her own class even if he or she has failed a number of classes or missed some time in school. However, night high schools are often restricted to students who are in their junior or senior year. Thus, students who have fallen behind in grade level and are not yet at the eleventh- or twelfth-grade level cannot make up credits except through summer school. Access to vocational programs is often restricted to eleventh- or twelfth-grade students as well. In addition, in many school districts, alternative school programs, while designed for students with "special needs," have developed reputations as "dumping grounds" for students with incorrigible problems. Whether or not these perceptions are accurate, the schools lose much of their attractiveness to teen parents.

- **Schools' willingness to accept school dropouts.** Although most schools will accept any student under 18 years old without hesitation (since all individuals under age 22 are entitled by law to a free public education), there have been instances in which principals or other school staff have been unwilling to accept LEAP teens. This tends to occur when the teen is far behind in grade level and will be placed in classes with younger students. In some cases, the fact that the LEAP teens are parents makes schools even more hesitant about accepting them.

While these policies generally exist for sound reasons, they may have unanticipated consequences for teen parents who are required to return to school by the human services department. In most counties, these issues have not been addressed systematically by LEAP and school staff.

C. Issues Affecting Attendance Monitoring

Counties cannot operate the LEAP incentive system properly without school attendance information. As noted above, during the first school year of LEAP operations, the ability of counties to obtain these data varied greatly. Some counties were able to secure information from most education providers quite regularly, while others were less successful and had to assume good attendance for many teens when data could not be obtained. In most areas, the process gradually improved as the year progressed, and early indications are that the second school year has seen further improvement.

The previous section described some of the issues counties encountered in establishing attendance reporting systems. This section focuses on operational factors that have emerged since that time. Although some problems have arisen in virtually every education program, LEAP staff have generally found that obtaining attendance information has been most difficult in large cities and when dealing with nontraditional education programs. The key problems include:

1. **Limited attendance monitoring or reporting capability.** Most education providers that receive public funding are required to keep fairly detailed records of student attendance. However, in many cases, these programs do not regularly maintain the type of attendance information required by LEAP. In most school districts, obtaining attendance data from traditional junior high schools and high schools has presented the fewest problems, even though there was virtually no history of collaboration at this level. These schools have a history of maintaining reliable, accessible attendance information on each student. They generally have clearly identified staff who deal with these data every day, and many have computerized data bases. This is not to say that problems have not come up. Many schools are understaffed, and attendance personnel may not have time to compile reports for LEAP. In other cases, principals have assigned responsibility for attendance reporting to a school staff person who has little time for it (such as a GRADS teacher). Finally, in some schools, available data are incomplete for LEAP's needs. For example, many high schools in Cincinnati do not maintain information on whether absences are excused or unexcused. Despite these problems, however, monitoring the attendance of high school students has generally been more straightforward than for students in other types of programs.

The situation is different with ABE/GED programs. Although these programs must generally maintain some attendance data in order to produce periodic reports to funding agencies, information on particular students may not be easily accessible on an ongoing basis. In addition, for many of these programs, the notion of an "absence" (which is the key to the LEAP attendance system) is irrelevant because students are allowed to come and go as they please; if anything, the program is only concerned with the student's total hours of attendance. Since the LEAP attendance policy centers on absences, the program regulations address this situation by noting that counties will generally need to use a Seven-Day Good Cause Notice to allow teens to respond to all absences reported by ABE/GED programs that might affect their grants.

In addition to lacking certain data, many ABE/GED programs do not have the administrative capacity to produce regular attendance reports. Particularly in larger cities, school district ABE/GED programs (usually the key ABE/GED providers for LEAP teens) often operate in the community, using or renting space in churches, community centers, libraries, or other locations. The organizations that host the programs often play little or no role in operating them, and ABE/GED staff may only be on site during the hours when classes meet (which are often in the evening). In many cases, there are no administrative staff. Although most school district ABE/GED programs fall under one administrative structure, the reporting relationships between instructors or other site staff and school district adult education offices vary considerably. In some cases, attendance data are not regularly reported to the central office and, even when they are, adult education offices have very limited administrative support in most school districts (and are unlikely to have access to computers). In addition, LEAP teens frequently move from one site to another, making it difficult for central office staff to keep track of their whereabouts. These operational issues are all critical to the successful implementation of LEAP since, in some counties, as many as half of all LEAP enrollees attend ABE/GED programs (a proportion that will increase now that LEAP has been extended to serve 19-year-olds).[10]

In terms of their capacity for attendance reporting, alternative high school diploma programs tend to fall somewhere between high schools and ABE/GED programs. On the one hand, like high schools, these programs usually maintain fairly detailed information on each student. In addition, staff from these programs tend to be accessible during regular school hours. On the other hand, in some cases, the attendance data maintained by these programs more closely resemble those maintained by ABE/GED programs than by regular high schools. For example, in one alternative program in Toledo, attendance records note hours attended rather than absences. In addition, since these programs usually serve students who have not been successful in traditional environments or are at risk of dropping out of school, they tend to operate quite differently from regular schools. Schedules and curricula may be more flexible, and schools may not routinely demand notes or other documentation when students are absent. In some cases, these policies are difficult for outside observers to understand. For example, one vocational high school in Cleveland also houses five distinct alternative education programs, each with its own target population and educational approach. The programs are entirely separate, and each maintains its own attendance rules and records.

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[10] Many of the issues that complicate relations between ABE/GED programs and human services agencies are gradually being addressed. Even before the implementation of LEAP and JOBS in Ohio, many counties had begun to develop linkages with ABE/GED programs to serve adults receiving AFDC or General Assistance. Thus, the notion of working with a mandatory population and reporting attendance to human services agencies is generally not new to ABE/GED administrators. In fact, with the advent of JOBS, human services referrals are accounting for a substantial proportion of ABE/GED students in many areas, and JOBS funds are sometimes provided to support program expansion. However, it is important to note that LEAP, while relatively small compared to JOBS, does present unique challenges to ABE/GED providers – principally, a younger population and slightly different reporting requirements.

2. Wide range of providers. In most cases, county LEAP staff permit teens to attend any program that leads to a high school diploma or GED. Thus, although LEAP teens are generally concentrated in programs operated by the largest school district in each county, they are often scattered among many individual schools and many types of programs. Each of the these providers is likely to have a unique administrative structure and a different set of contacts, and to maintain different types of attendance records. This complicates the task of developing reliable attendance reporting systems, particularly in big cities, where teens tend to be dispersed among a wider and more diverse set of providers. Even if a particular program has only one or two LEAP teens, it is still necessary for LEAP staff to identify the appropriate contact person, explain the attendance reporting system, and follow up each month if data are not received. This task usually falls to case managers, who are simultaneously attempting to provide a variety of services to teens.

3. Definitional issues. Most schools use the same state-generated form to report the attendance of LEAP teens. However, the definitions of key terms such as "absence" or "excused absence" may differ widely from district to district, or even from school to school. For example, schools use very different criteria for excusing absences. Although LEAP rules instruct staff to accept the schools' definitions of excused absences, LEAP staff nevertheless need to understand the information that is reported if they hope to implement the program equitably. Similarly, it is helpful for staff to understand whether there are absence reasons (for example, child care problems) that are considered unexcused by a school but are grounds for good cause under LEAP rules.

One of the most important definitional issues involves the measurement of attendance in high schools. In many schools, particularly in big cities, a student is officially considered present for the day if he or she attends homeroom, which is often held at the start of the school day. Thus, in such schools, a LEAP teens could miss most of her classes during a month and still earn the bonus. This is clearly contrary to the spirit of the LEAP attendance requirement, but it is difficult for LEAP staff to address, since the regulations require them to accept school definitions and class attendance data are seldom available in the school attendance office on an ongoing basis.

4. LEAP data system problems. As discussed in Chapter 1, LEAP's attendance monitoring system operates via ODHS' statewide computerized welfare data base. County staff enter data on each teen's current school enrollment into the system, and School Absence Reports are then generated and mailed to schools from Columbus each month. However, this system has frequently not operated as planned. Thus, schools often have not received the names of the teens for whom reports are needed until well after the deadline for reporting. This has severely hindered the reporting system – and, consequently, implementation of the entire incentive structure – in some counties. Appendix B includes a detailed discussion of this issue.

IV. Strategies to Enhance Collaboration Between Human Services and Education Agencies

The issues and obstacles described above have affected each county differently, and each has developed a distinctive approach to the task of developing and maintaining interagency linkages. This section discusses some of the strategies counties have developed to address these issues.

A. Strategies to Promote Organizational Cooperation

Counties have used a variety of methods to promote more regular communication with education providers. These include:

- **Regular meetings or briefings.** In some counties, LEAP staff meet periodically with principals, GRADS teachers, or other school staff to brief them on new developments in the LEAP program and to discuss issues and obstacles that have emerged. These meetings most typically take place at the beginning of the school year. In a few districts, school staff have visited LEAP offices to brief county staff on the programs available to teens throughout the district. In several counties, ongoing communication is facilitated by community-wide committees designed to coordinate services for adolescent parents. These bodies often include representatives from schools, human services agencies, and other key service providers.

- **LEAP staff assignments.** In a few counties – including Cuyahoga, Franklin, and Stark – LEAP case managers are assigned to particular schools and are responsible for obtaining attendance information and playing the role of liaison. As noted above, in Cuyahoga County, LEAP staff are also stationed full time in six Cleveland high schools. Personal relationships can help to strengthen the interagency linkage.

- **Contracting.** As described in Chapter 2, two counties – Summit and Lawrence – have contracted with local education agencies to perform certain key LEAP functions. Such contracts do not *necessarily* promote collaboration – the Lawrence arrangement, for example, has not functioned effectively – but they can create a vehicle for ongoing communication and provide an incentive for schools to devote resources to LEAP.

B. Strategies to Improve Attendance Reporting

Most of the strategies developed to improve attendance reporting – with the exception of the Akron contract – are relatively simple administrative steps designed to streamline the process. None of these approaches has led to dramatic improvement, but several appear to be promising in specific circumstances. They include:

- **Consolidating reports.** Since the vast majority of LEAP teens attend education programs operated by the largest public school district in each county, some LEAP managers or school district officials have created centralized reporting arrangements, through which attendance information from a group of schools or programs is reported to the county department of human services by a central school district contact. For example, as noted earlier, in both Akron and Toledo (Summit and Lucas counties, respectively), one school district official is responsible for compiling attendance information for all programs operated by the school district. Centralized systems have also been developed in several smaller communities and often cover ABE/GED programs. For example, in Elyria – one of the two large cities in Lorain County – the school district office in charge of ABE/GED programs produces a monthly report covering all nine of the programs it operates. Similar systems are in place in Dayton and Canton. Consolidation can reduce the number of actors involved in attendance reporting – thereby streamlining the process – but it has not been used effectively in the largest cities, in part because these school districts are too large and complex to develop such systems.

- **Using computerized data.** Many individual high schools maintain attendance records in computerized data bases. In some cases, these systems have been used to produce attendance reports for LEAP. However, Toledo is the only city in which a *district-wide* computer system has been used to produce a consolidated attendance report for all high school students in the district. The system has operated imperfectly, in large part because it has been difficult to develop a mechanism by which LEAP staff can notify the school district about which students are eligible for LEAP in a given month.

For a variety of reasons, district-wide computerized reporting systems have not been developed in the three largest cities. In Cincinnati and Columbus, the school districts do not have district-wide computerized systems for high schools, which would make such arrangements easier.[11] In Cleveland, such a data base does exist, but the county human services agency and the Cleveland public schools have not yet been able to devise an effective automated reporting system.

- **Targeting certain programs.** To address the shortage of administrative resources in ABE/GED programs in Cleveland, the public school district's adult education office has requested that all LEAP teens attend one of eight designated programs (out of a total of about 50 operated by the district). JOBS funds have been used to develop special record-keeping and attendance reporting systems at these locations. Adult education staff contend that none of the other ABE/GED programs are equipped to report attendance to the human services department. However, LEAP staff maintain that they do not have the authority to require teens to attend only certain ABE/GED programs, especially when another may be more convenient to the teen's home.

In addition to these strategies, the most effective ones have probably been those (described above) that were designed to improve overall cooperation between the systems. Attendance reporting issues, like any other problems, can be more easily addressed if efficient lines of communication exist.

V. Linkages with JTPA for Summer Jobs

Participants in the LEAP program should, in theory, have better access than other teenagers to summer jobs through the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) operated by the JTPA agency in each service delivery area (SDA). The LEAP regulations specify that the "CDHS shall develop a working relationship with JTPA to promote and coordinate the hiring of LEAP Program participants in the JTPA summer job programs. Earnings from these jobs will be disregarded" (with respect to the teen's AFDC grant).[12]

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[11] Both of these districts have computerized data bases, and school staff do enter attendance information into computers. However, the individual schools in the district are not connected through a network. Thus, at the end of each school year, the district must copy data from each school's computer system into the district-wide data base. This means that no district-wide attendance data are available during the school year.

[12] Earnings from JTPA summer jobs are always disregarded for teens who are not case heads. ODHS obtained a waiver to apply this disregard to all LEAP teens, regardless of case status.

However, in practice, it appears that relatively few LEAP teens obtained employment in the summer of 1990 through JTPA. Although several administrative factors may have contributed to this result (see below), it appears that lack of interest on the part of the teens was the key explanation for low participation rates. Some counties attempted to facilitate LEAP participants' access to summer jobs, and, in a few counties, the effort was extensive. However, these efforts produced limited results. For example, the LEAP programs in Trumbull and Montgomery counties sent letters to participants encouraging them to seek employment through the JTPA program. In Montgomery County, LEAP staff also participated in an advisory committee for SYEP and organized a special session for LEAP teens on the program application process. However, the teens' response to these efforts was low. Extensive coordination efforts were also undertaken in Hamilton and Franklin counties. The local JTPA agencies in both counties promised to accept all LEAP teens for whom slots were available. Recruitment information was mailed to all clients, and case managers also discussed the JTPA program with many LEAP clients individually. Despite these activities, the response was disappointing. In all, only 14 LEAP participants enrolled in the JTPA summer jobs program in Hamilton County. In Franklin County, the response was somewhat better: 53 teens participated, and others were interested but unable to obtain positions.

Other factors that may have contributed to low utilization of the summer jobs program in some counties include:

- **Limited state coordination.** In its initial planning for LEAP, ODHS staff wanted to "guarantee" access to summer jobs for LEAP teens. However, when they attempted to operationalize this policy through discussions with state JTPA officials, they found that the JTPA system, like the education system, was highly decentralized, and that each SDA would have to make its own decision about whether to assign priority to LEAP teens. Eventually, ODHS decided to soften the language and instruct each county to work with the local SDA to make summer jobs more readily available to LEAP teens.

- **Limited local coordination.** In the first summer of program operations, not all counties placed a priority on establishing systematic linkages with the local JTPA agency or "marketing" the possibility of summer jobs to LEAP clients. In some counties, this stemmed from the fact that LEAP staff were devoting more of their energies to other aspects of the program. For example, some counties used the summer months to conduct home visits with LEAP participants or to develop linkages with external agencies. In other counties, it appears that the LEAP staff made a conscious decision not to encourage summer employment, because they believed that the teens needed to have time to spend with their babies.

- **JTPA-based problems.** In a few counties, difficulties within the JTPA agency also contributed to the problem. For example, some counties (such as Stark) found the local JTPA agency uninterested in working with the county department of human services, although recent efforts appear to show some promise. In other counties, demand for summer jobs may exceed the supply of slots available through JTPA.

VI. Conclusions

The process of building linkages between human services and education agencies at the local level has been complex and time-consuming, particularly in large cities. The tight LEAP implementation schedule, the limited incentives for schools to cooperate, and the decentralized nature of the education system have all contributed to these difficulties. In addition, in a number of cases, the implementation process has brought to light unaddressed policy questions and mismatches between welfare and education rules that were not anticipated during the planning period.

However, despite these obstacles, substantial progress has been made. Schools have generally been supportive, and most counties have been able to obtain fairly regular attendance information from most providers. While problems persist in some cities, the situation appears to be improving. In addition, in several schools and school districts, human services and education agencies have taken steps to develop broader linkages designed to assist the LEAP teens in meeting the program's mandate. In most instances, these wider efforts have been greatly facilitated by the GRADS program, which has played a vital role in LEAP implementation to date.

In the long run, the evaluation will assess whether the institutional linkages developed to implement LEAP lead to additional joint efforts to assist this population in completing school. These might include increased funding for education alternatives, policy changes designed to improve access to these programs for dropouts, or steps to make traditional schools more hospitable to teen parents (for example, additional GRADS units or on-site child care facilities).

CHAPTER 5

FINANCIAL REWARDS AND PENALTIES

Financial incentives are the heart of the LEAP model. Many past programs have used welfare grant reductions to induce clients to participate in employment-related activities. However, the notion of adjusting welfare grants each month based on the welfare recipient's level of participation is much rarer, and the addition of positive financial incentives in a large-scale program is, to our knowledge, unique to LEAP. These features make the program administratively complex. Prior to implementation, some observers questioned the feasibility of a system that attempted to tie grant levels so closely to school attendance behavior.

This chapter examines counties' early experiences with the LEAP financial incentive system. Part I focuses on the prevalence of sanctions and bonuses, and the reactions of staff and clients to these features of the program. Parts II and III discuss two issues that are critical to the implementation of any program that uses grant reductions to enforce a participation requirement: procedures allowing clients to appeal proposed sanctions and rules defining which clients can be excused from the mandate for legitimate reasons.

I. Early Operational Experiences with Sanctions and Bonuses

The LEAP financial incentive system is operational in all of the research counties. Although staff have experienced a variety of problems with this complex, multi-stage process (many of which are discussed in other parts of this report), large numbers of welfare grants have been adjusted in response to eligible teens' school attendance behavior.

A. Implementation of Bonuses and Sanctions

Chapter 2 discussed how the institutional structure of county LEAP programs has affected their ability to process sanctions and bonuses in a timely manner. Briefly, in counties where LEAP case managers do not handle income maintenance (IM) functions, staff must transmit forms requesting grant adjustments to the appropriate income maintenance worker. (Entering information into the statewide computerized LEAP tracking system does not automatically generate a grant adjustment.) Several of the counties that have not developed special staffing structures to facilitate this linkage have encountered severe problems with the grant adjustment process. In some of these counties, staff report that as many as half of the requested actions are not processed on schedule. These difficulties are more likely to affect sanctions than bonuses, since the former involve a more complex process (see below). Staff report that if sanctions are not processed on time, they may never occur, whereas bonuses are much more likely to be delivered even if they are late.[1]

Staff interviews suggest that the key reasons for this problem are mostly related to the increasingly complex job responsibilities of income maintenance staff. Specifically, these workers are accountable for large numbers of cases (often more than 300) and are required to remember an ever-expanding set of rules and regulations. Since LEAP cases generally make up a small proportion of each worker's total caseload, LEAP grant adjustment requests are not commonly received and tend to be accorded relatively low priority. This is also likely to be true because LEAP action requests generally arrive via a form rather than through a face-to-face or telephone inquiry from a client. The low priority given to these actions, when coupled with high staff turnover in many counties, makes it difficult to keep training up to date. Finally, in some of the larger counties, income maintenance staff report that the process of routing the request to the appropriate worker is quite complex and may take several days. In some cases, sanction request forms are completed incorrectly by LEAP staff or are sent to the wrong IM worker.

Problems in processing sanctions and bonuses have been a critical part of the implementation experience of some counties, and attempting to solve these problems has consumed tremendous quantities of staff time and energy. During the past few months, several of the counties that have been experiencing severe problems have instituted measures designed to obtain more complete information about IM responses to LEAP grant adjustment requests. These efforts have allowed them to develop strategies to improve the situation. It is unclear whether financial incentives will prove to be effective in the long run, but it is obvious that if grants are not adjusted properly, the system cannot have its desired effect.

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[1] Requested sanctions are never technically forgiven. If a sanction is not processed, a "collectible overpayment" still applies to the case.

B. Prevalence of Sanctioning in LEAP

At this point, the best data available on LEAP sanctioning rates are maintained by counties.[2] Thus, for this report, MDRC obtained information from five of the research counties (including the three largest) on sanctions and bonuses *requested* for the month of January 1991 (as noted earlier, sanctions requested by LEAP staff are not always processed by IM workers). Although direct comparisons are difficult to make (for reasons discussed below), these county-reported figures suggest that the proportion of clients who are referred for sanctions by the LEAP program is substantially higher than in mandatory welfare-to-work programs for adults previously evaluated by MDRC. The LEAP rates are more similar to those that have been experienced in other mandatory programs targeted at teenage parents, notably the Wisconsin Learnfare program and the OFA Teenage Parent Demonstration.

In three of the five counties submitting data, LEAP staff requested reductions in the January 1991 AFDC grant of approximately one-fifth of the teens known to the program at that point. The rate was substantially lower in one of the remaining counties and higher in the other, approaching one-third. In all counties, more than two-thirds of the requested sanctions were for failure to attend assessment interviews or failure to enroll in school. Relatively fewer were for excessive unexcused absences among teens who were enrolled in school (in most cases, these absences would have occurred in October).[3]

In previous MDRC studies of mandatory welfare-to-work programs for adults, the proportion of clients who have been referred for sanctions has generally been relatively low. The highest rates were found in a Cook County, Illinois, program offering job search and work experience. In that study (Friedlander et al., 1987), MDRC found that 12.4 percent of the clients who were identified as newly mandatory for the program and randomly assigned to participate were ever referred for a sanction during the first nine months after that point. In San Diego's Saturation Work Initiative Model (SWIM), which provided job search, work experience, education, and training activities, the corresponding rate for the first 12 months after random assignment was 10.6 percent (Hamilton and Friedlander, 1989). Rates were well below 10 percent in all the other welfare-to-work programs evaluated by MDRC (Gueron and Pauly, 1991).

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[2] ODHS has limited information about the performance of county LEAP programs, largely because the statewide data system developed for the program has not functioned effectively. However, several counties have excellent local management information systems that provide reliable data. Appendix B discusses this issue in detail.

[3] LEAP staff in several counties reported that most teens either attend school fairly regularly or completely ignore the program requirements; there are relatively few teens who remain enrolled but attend sporadically. This may help to explain why the number of sanctions requested for excessive unexcused absences appears to be low relative to those requested for other reasons.

Data on sanctioning are also available for the Wisconsin Learnfare program, which, like LEAP, serves teenagers. During the 1988-89 academic year, the proportion of teen parents subject to Learnfare statewide who were sanctioned during each calendar month ranged from a low of 8.7 percent to a high of 16.6 percent (Greenberg and Sherman, 1989).[4]

C. Explanations for LEAP's Sanctioning Rate

The role of sanctions in LEAP and the rules governing their use are quite different from those in the adult welfare-to-work programs mentioned above, and there are several reasons to expect that sanctioning rates in LEAP would be substantially higher than in those programs. Specifically:

- **There is likely to be more noncompliance in LEAP.** LEAP teens are expected to "do" more than clients in most welfare-to-work programs. With a few exceptions, welfare-to-work initiatives have generally not required mandatory clients to participate in activities continuously. Rather, most of the programs expected clients to engage in short-term activities lasting several weeks.[5] In LEAP, non-exempt teen parents must attend school continuously (except during school vacations) for as long as they are eligible for the program. In addition, especially for teens attending traditional high school programs, LEAP requires many more hours of participation per week than have most other programs. Finally, unlike some of the activities that welfare-to-work programs utilize for adults, school is virtually always available (during the academic year). Thus, in LEAP, there tends to be very little "unassigned" time while clients are waiting for an activity to begin. In general, it seems clear that when expectations are higher, there are more occasions for noncompliance.[6]

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[4] In drawing comparisons among these figures, it is important to note that the LEAP and Learnfare rates differ from the welfare-to-work figures (and will differ, too, from the Teenage Parent Demonstration figures currently being estimated) because they refer to the percentage of LEAP clients who were referred for sanctions *in a particular month*. The percentage of clients *ever* referred for a sanction during a 9- or 12-month period in these programs would be higher.

In addition to this distinction between longitudinal and point-in-time sanctioning rates, it is important to note that these figures are derived from different bases. The SWIM and Cook County figures refer to clients who were randomly assigned to the experimental group for an MDRC evaluation. In SWIM, random assignment occurred when clients attended a program orientation. In Cook County, it took place earlier, when clients were identified as eligible for the program. Thus, the Cook County figure includes clients who were sanctioned for failing to attend the initial orientation, while the SWIM figure does not. If the SWIM figure included those sanctioned for failure to attend orientation, it would probably be higher. The LEAP figures – like the Cook County figures – do include clients sanctioned for failure to attend assessment.

[5] The JOBS program requires continuous participation, but no evidence is available yet on the ability of states to operationalize this requirement. Among the major programs evaluated during the 1980s, California's Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) and SWIM programs, the Pennsylvania Saturation Work Program, and West Virginia's Community Work Experience Program required continuous participation, at least for some welfare recipients.

- **Case managers are more likely to know about noncompliance in LEAP.** Although staff in welfare-to-work programs usually developed reporting relationships with service providers, these procedures tended to provide less detailed and more irregular data than do the systems devised for LEAP. Since school attendance (rather than the provision or arrangement of activities) is the *raison d'etre* of LEAP, monitoring is at the heart of the program, and case managers are more likely to know relatively quickly when clients are not complying with program requirements.

- **LEAP case managers are more likely to define certain behavior as noncompliance**. LEAP, unlike most other programs, uses explicit definitions of acceptable and unacceptable rates of attendance. This difference is especially evident with regard to the LEAP sanction for excessive absenteeism. The other sanction reasons (failure to attend assessment and failure to enroll in school) refer to easily defined events and have close equivalents in other programs. However, once a LEAP teen enrolls in school, the explicit attendance standards separate LEAP from other programs. In welfare-to-work programs, case managers are likely to rely on looser definitions of noncompliance and, in many cases, to look for broader patterns of poor participation.

- **LEAP case managers are more likely to respond with a sanction when noncompliance is detected.** Once again, program rules give staff less discretion in this area. In other programs, MDRC found that case managers used a variety of informal means to persuade clients to participate *before* resorting to financial penalties. In the GAIN program, a period of "conciliation" follows the first instance of noncompliance. During this period, a client who has been out of compliance without a good reason can avoid a sanction by participating satisfactorily. Even if noncompliance continues, the process leading to a grant reduction involves many steps and can take months to complete. In LEAP, case managers also frequently use informal methods to persuade teens to comply (including home visits, phone calls, and letters), but these are much more likely to accompany a sanction than to delay or replace one.

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[6] However, it is also important to note that a substantial fraction of LEAP teens would attend school even if the program did not exist. Indeed, approximately half of LEAP's client population reported being enrolled in school at intake. This is higher than the proportion of adult welfare recipients who said they were participating in education, training, or employment activities at intake in previous MDRC studies.

In addition to these issues – all of which seem to point fairly unambiguously toward more frequent sanctioning in LEAP – there are other important differences between LEAP and other programs, the effects of which are less clear. For example:

- **The amount of the sanction may be different in LEAP.** LEAP sanctions amount to $62 (or $124, if one considers the difference between full compliance – which earns a bonus – and noncompliance) out of a typical grant of about $300. In other programs (including Wisconsin Learnfare), sanctions usually involve removing the needs of the noncompliant individual from the grant calculation. The amount of the grant reduction under such a sanction varies from state to state, depending on the grant level, and thus may be either larger or smaller than the LEAP sanction. In Wisconsin, a high-grant state, the average Learnfare sanction amounts to about $100 (Corbett et al., 1989). It seems plausible that the amount of the sanction could affect the rate of compliance and, hence, the sanctioning rate.[7]

- **In LEAP, the noncompliant individual is not always the one who is sanctioned.** LEAP and the Wisconsin Learnfare program both serve teenagers who are not the heads of AFDC cases and thus may, in effect, sanction parents in response to their children's behavior. It is not clear at this point how a sanction imposed on a parent actually affects the teen (although more information on this question will be available in MDRC's next report). However, once again, it seems possible that this could affect rates of compliance.

- **In LEAP, education activities are the only acceptable option.** Unlike most welfare-to-work programs, LEAP does not allow clients to choose among several types of activities (although many teens are permitted to choose between high school and ABE/GED programs). Specifically, employment and training activities are not acceptable. Although there is some evidence that welfare recipients tend to have positive attitudes toward programs that will help them find jobs (Hoerz and Hanson, 1986), it seems clear that most teenage dropouts do not have positive feelings about school. This may contribute to higher rates of noncompliance.

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[7] Another important difference is that, in LEAP, the sanction amount is fixed at $62, and does not vary with the teen's household size. By contrast, in programs that remove the noncompliant individual from the grant calculation, the absolute amount of the sanction depends on the number of recipients in the case.

It is not immediately clear why LEAP sanctioning rates appear to exceed those of Wisconsin. One key difference between the programs is that, in Wisconsin, teens who are enrolled in school do not become subject to the monthly attendance requirement (and are not sanctioned) unless they have 10 or more days of unexcused absences in a semester. Thus, it may be that some of the teen parents who are not subject to monthly reporting in Wisconsin did, in fact, exceed two unexcused absences in one or more months (but had fewer than 10 in the semester). In Ohio, this would have led to a sanction request. It is difficult to test this hypothesis in the absence of data about the school attendance of Wisconsin teens who are not subject to monthly reporting.

In addition, there are differences in the exemptions (which spare a teen from receiving a sanction) that may be granted to teens in Wisconsin. For example, teens who cannot finish all the coursework necessary for a high school diploma by age 20 are exempt from Learnfare's school attendance requirement.

It is also important to note that, in Wisconsin, sanctioning is much more prevalent in Milwaukee County, by far the largest urban county in the state; the rate there is approximately four times as high as the rate in the rest of the state. The Ohio figures noted above, which are mostly for urban counties, are similar to the Learnfare sanctioning rate for teen parents in Milwaukee.

Although only preliminary data are available for LEAP, Learnfare, and the Teenage Parent Demonstration – and the rules regarding sanctions differ among these initiatives – it seems clear that all three of these mandatory programs for teenage parents are producing higher sanction rates than are typically observed in welfare-to-work programs for adults.

D. Prevalence of Bonuses

Since bonuses are unique to the LEAP program, it is impossible to say whether the rates of bonus payments are higher or lower than expected. Overall, in the counties that provided data to MDRC, the number of bonus requests was similar to the number of sanction requests. However, these figures varied substantially across counties, ranging from less than one-sixth to more than one-third of the teens known to the program in January 1991. Approximately four out of five of these bonuses were requested for teens who met the attendance standard (usually in October). The remainder were one-time enrollment bonuses.

As with sanctions, the payment of bonuses often involves little discretion. This is particularly true of the enrollment bonus. Teens provide a letter, form, school schedule, or other proof, and the bonus is issued routinely. Payment of this bonus is not affected by the teen's subsequent attendance (or lack thereof).

Bonuses linked to school attendance are somewhat less clear-cut, primarily because information is not always available. The LEAP regulations state that, if attendance information cannot be obtained for a teen who has previously verified enrollment, staff are to assume that the teen met the attendance requirement and issue the bonus. Although it was expected that this provision would be applied infrequently, such bonuses have been issued relatively often in the counties that have had the most problems with attendance monitoring (see Chapter 4). The lengths to which staff will go to obtain data before issuing a presumptive bonus seem to vary from county to county, which may help to explain the wide disparity in bonus rates noted above.[8]

E. Staff Attitudes Toward Sanctions and Bonuses

Most LEAP case managers interviewed during field visits to counties expressed positive opinions about the program model and the use of financial incentives to induce school attendance, although some are skeptical that sanctions and bonuses, by themselves, will persuade teens with serious problems to attend school.

However, as might be expected, staff tend to be more ambivalent about sanctions than bonuses. Nearly all staff appear to be supportive of bonus payments, and feel that they provide an effective inducement for school attendance. A sizable group of case managers feel similarly about sanctions, expressing the view that grant reductions are fair, necessary to induce compliance, and in the long-run best interests of the teen, especially since clients are given several opportunities to respond before sanctions are proposed (see below). In some cases, staff suggest that sanctions (or the threat of sanctions) can help to persuade teens to "take notice" of the program and give serious thought to returning to school. Some workers complained that when income maintenance staff do not process sanction requests in a timely manner, the program "loses its teeth" (and they lose credibility).

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[8] Because LEAP has a minimum attendance requirement, there are also situations in which teens qualify for neither a bonus nor a sanction. This occurs when a teen has more than four countable absences in a month (which makes her ineligible for a bonus) but fewer than three unexcused absences. This policy was developed to prevent the payment of bonuses to teens who miss many days of school but manage to obtain excuses for most of them.

In practice, the three-tiered policy is sometimes difficult for staff to explain and for teens to understand. In addition, because absences for which the teen can provide a physician's statement are waived, the only way for a teen to fall into the middle category is to have several absences that are excused by the school or the county, but for which no doctor's note is available. Reliable data on the prevalence of this situation are not currently available.

Other staff are less supportive of sanctions. Early in the planning period, staff in several counties suggested that the sanctions be dropped from the model and that only bonuses be paid. At this point, a substantial number of LEAP case managers -- particularly in counties where case management responsibility has been placed with social services workers -- still feel that sanctions are inherently unfair. For example, one case manager said:

> I don't believe in sanctions morally. We try to make all teenagers go to school, but if a teen isn't on welfare, we wouldn't dream of taking money out of her pocket. I don't think it is fair to treat welfare recipients differently from other citizens.

Others have expressed reservations about sanctioning parents because of their children's poor school attendance. Although staff have encountered relatively little active resistance in these cases, some parents have expressed frustration, contending that their ability to force teens to go to school (and stay there) is quite limited. Finally, some staff have suggested that sanctioning may only exacerbate the basic problems that prevent teens from attending school in the first place. It is not possible to determine how these views affect case managers' implementation of the incentive system.

F. Teens' Responses to Sanctions and Bonuses

At this early stage in the evaluation, there are no quantitative data available to assess the effect of LEAP's financial incentive system on teens' school attendance and completion behavior. Eventually, the research will examine this question by comparing the attendance patterns of the treatment and control groups, but even then it will be difficult to disentangle the impacts produced by financial incentives from those driven by other aspects of the program such as case management. Group interviews and the survey of LEAP participants will also be used to help understand teens' reactions to sanctions and bonuses.

At this point, the key available sources of information on teens' attitudes are staff interviews and observation of assessment interviews. Two general points seem clear. First, as might be expected, teens' reactions depend on their initial attitudes and plans regarding school. Teens seem to fall into three broad categories:

- One substantial group of teens attends school regularly and expects to graduate. This would have been true with or without the LEAP program. These teens (who will generally receive bonuses) tend to have positive views of LEAP, which may provide extra money or child care assistance. Although the possibility of a bonus may make these teens more careful about their attendance, the program may not have a large impact on their behavior.

- At the other extreme is a group of teens who are totally resistent to attending school. In most cases, these teens have dropped out and have no intention of returning. Some of them, having heard about LEAP through the grapevine, may refuse even to attend an assessment interview. Others may show up for assessment but never enroll in school. A few others may enroll in school simply to obtain the one-time enrollment bonus but rarely or never attend after that. Some case managers feel that teens who are closer to aging out of LEAP and have been out of school longer are most likely to fall into this group.

- Finally, there is a middle group that is uncertain about school. Some of these teens are enrolled in school but have poor attendance and are in danger of dropping out. Others are not currently enrolled but may not be totally resistent to returning, especially if ABE/GED programs or other alternatives are available. Staff suggest that teens in this category are most likely to be affected by LEAP. Staff report that a typical profile of a teen in this group would be someone who has dropped out of school but is close to graduating.

The second major point is that active resistance to sanctions has been quite rare. Given the relatively large number of requested sanctions, one might think that many teens would have sought exemptions, requested hearings, or expressed open resentment toward the LEAP program. In fact, while all of these have occurred, they have not been widespread. As discussed above, there are reports that a group of "hard core" teens, especially in big cities, has steadfastly refused to cooperate despite many consecutive months of sanctions. However, these teens seem more likely to ignore the program than to attack it.

At this point, it is not clear why responses to LEAP have been relatively muted, especially given the clamor surrounding the Wisconsin Learnfare program. One theory is that the inclusion of bonuses (which appear to be used about as frequently as sanctions) and substantial funding for case management are largely responsible for the more positive reaction of welfare recipients and advocates to LEAP (although it is also important to note that some other observers have objected to the notion of "coddling" teenage parents and "paying them to go to school"). Another possibility is that, since many sanctions are not processed, the effective rate at this point is not nearly as high as it seems.[9] In addition, some have speculated that LEAP's "due process" procedures, which provide teens with several opportunities to voice grievances, may have reduced the number of sanction requests based on erroneous or incomplete information. Finally, other differences between the two programs -- such as Learnfare's coverage of the entire teenage population on welfare, not just pregnant and parenting teens -- may have contributed to the differences in public response to them.

The next two sections explore in more detail the program's experiences with due process procedures and exemptions, two areas that can profoundly affect the implementation of a mandatory program for welfare clients.

II. Due Process Issues

As discussed in Chapter 1, the LEAP regulations describe a specific process designed to ensure that clients' rights to due process are protected. Essentially, teens (or case heads, if the eligible teen parent receives AFDC on someone else's grant) have two opportunities to respond before a sanction is imposed for failure to enroll in school or for excessive unexcused absences. First, whenever the county receives information from an education provider indicating that a teen did not meet the attendance requirement during the previous month (or if a teen fails to provide verification of school enrollment in the allotted 10-day period), the client receives a Seven-Day Good Cause Notice. If it applies to excessive absences, this form indicates the dates of the reported absences and allows the teen seven days to claim "good cause" for any or all of the absences (see Chapter 1 for a list of good cause reasons). If good cause is not granted, the client receives a second form, a Prior Notice of Right to a State Hearing. This form, used routinely whenever a sanction is proposed by the county, describes the proposed action and the reason, and gives the client 90 days to request a hearing before an ODHS hearing officer. If the client requests a hearing within 15 days, the action is delayed pending the outcome of the hearing.[10]

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[9] Staff also have pointed out that teens who are sanctioned may sometimes receive increased support from housing and utility assistance programs, lessening the impact of the sanction on household income.

[10] Federal AFDC rules require that recipients be given at least 10 days prior notice when their benefits are to be reduced or terminated. In Ohio, the prior notice period was extended from 10 to 15 days as part of the settlement of a 1984 class action lawsuit filed against ODHS.

A. Lag Between Action and Response

The combined length of the two response periods, along with the timetables for receiving absence information from schools and adjusting welfare grants, explains why LEAP sanctions occur three months after the school attendance that triggers them. For example, since attendance information for October is due from schools by November 5, and the good cause and prior notice periods take a minimum of 22 days (plus 5 to 6 days for processing and mailing), a sanction could not be processed until the end of November at the earliest. This is too late to affect the December grant, so the sanction must be imposed in January.[11] Figure 5.1 presents two examples of this process.

Many observers have pointed out that the long lag between attendance (or lack thereof) and the financial response weakens the LEAP incentive system. Program staff note that teens are sometimes confused about why their checks are reduced (or increased) in particular months, and are unable to perceive a direct connection between their behavior and the size of their grant. This problem is especially pronounced in the autumn, when teens can attend (or miss) high school for three months before any grant adjustment occurs (aside from an enrollment bonus). This is because the September, October, and November welfare grants correspond to the summer months, when high schools are not in session. Finally, because each of the key steps in the process is subject to delays in some instances (for example, absence reports may be late, LEAP staff may not mail notices immediately, or IM workers may not process grant adjustments in a timely fashion), bonuses and sanctions are often delayed by more than three months. In some cases (primarily those where absence information is provided very late), LEAP staff may issue a presumptive bonus three months after the attendance month and then recoup the bonus at a later time if an attendance report later indicates that the teen was not, in fact, in school. These situations are especially confusing to clients.

B. Advantages of the LEAP Due Process Procedures

Despite the problems caused by the long lag, there are reasons to believe that the LEAP notification and response procedures have been beneficial in other ways. Most

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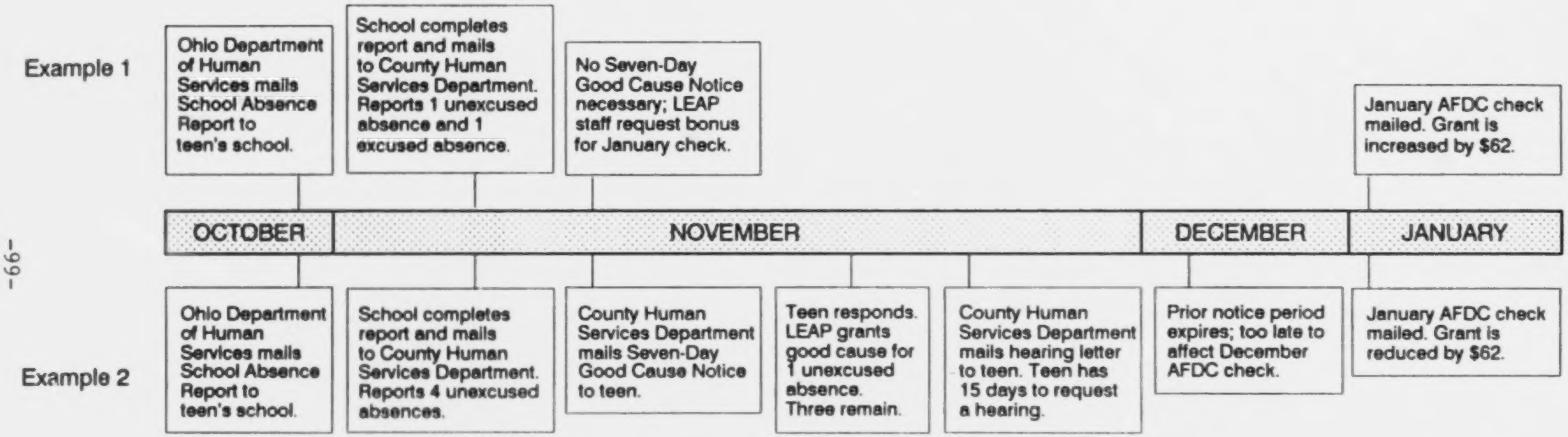
[11] Bonuses, which do not require good cause or prior notice procedures, could be paid in two months. However, ODHS decided that establishing a separate schedule for the two types of payments would create more confusion.

FIGURE 5.1

EXAMPLES OF LEAP GRANT ADJUSTMENT TIMETABLES


Example 1
Ohio Department of Human Services mails School Absence Report to teen's school.
School completes report and mails to County Human Services Department. Reports 1 unexcused absence and 1 excused absence.
No Seven-Day Good Cause Notice necessary; LEAP staff request bonus for January check.
January AFDC check mailed. Grant is increased by $62.
OCTOBER
NOVEMBER
DECEMBER
JANUARY
Example 2
Ohio Department of Human Services mails School Absence Report to teen's school.
School completes report and mails to County Human Services Department. Reports 4 unexcused absences.
County Human Services Department mails Seven-Day Good Cause Notice to teen.
Teen responds. LEAP grants good cause for 1 unexcused absence. Three remain.
County Human Services Department mails hearing letter to teen. Teen has 15 days to request a hearing.
Prior notice period expires; too late to affect December AFDC check.
January AFDC check mailed. Grant is reduced by $62.

Example 1 (the boxes above the scale) refers to a teen with one unexcused absence and one excused absence in October.

Example 2 (the boxes below the scale) refers to a teen with four unexcused absences in October.

importantly, the fact that LEAP rules provide teens with several opportunities to exercise their right to due process appears to have been partly responsible for the relatively small number of fair hearings requested in response to proposed sanctions. As described in Chapter 1, the Wisconsin Learnfare program, which does not allow an intermediate "good cause" period, has experienced large numbers of fair hearings and legal challenges. This may be, in part, because the only way for a client to respond to a proposed sanction in Wisconsin – for example, when a school report is in error – is to request a formal hearing. As a result, welfare and school staff spend large amounts of time attending hearings.

In contrast, LEAP teens can resolve problems before a hearing letter is issued by responding to the Seven-Day Good Cause Notice. Interviews with program staff indicate that the notification and response procedures are implemented according to the regulations in the vast majority of cases, and that teens often respond to Seven-Day Good Cause Notices. (This does not necessarily mean that good cause is granted in all cases.) Staff report that hearings have been relatively rare.

In addition to preventing legal challenges, there is some evidence that the due process rules have helped to improve the public image of LEAP and to gain cooperation from education providers. Prior to the implementation of the program, some predicted that school staff would be hesitant to provide attendance information that would affect students' welfare grants. MDRC found this to be true in some instances in previous studies of programs in which attendance information was reported by schools to welfare agencies. However, in LEAP, school staff appear to feel more comfortable knowing that teens will be given ample opportunities to respond before grants are reduced.

III. Exemptions

Eligible teen parents may be exempted from the LEAP school attendance mandate if one or more of the reasons listed in Chapter 1 applies. Depending on the reason, exemptions may last for a definite time period (for example, until the youngest child reaches three months old) or remain in effect indefinitely, until the reason no longer applies (for example, until a suitable child care arrangement can be made). Exemptions are generally granted by LEAP case managers, either at the initial assessment or when the issue becomes salient.

A. Types of Exemptions in LEAP

In LEAP, the reasons for exemption fall into two categories. The first set of reasons is relatively unambiguous because it refers to specific, easily defined situations. The key examples are the exemptions for teens who are primary caregivers of children under three months old, those who are in the last seven months of a pregnancy, or those who are affected by a medically verified illness (of the teen or her child).

Most of the other reasons for exemption involve considerably more staff discretion. The most obvious example is the "other exceptional circumstances" reason, which is not defined in the regulations. However, many of the other reasons, despite being clearly stated, are not always easily identified. For example, in deciding whether to exempt a teen for lack of child care, staff may not face a clear-cut situation. In some instances, space is available in a certified day care home, but the teen may contend that the slot is inconvenient to her home and school. In such a case, staff need to decide whether the slot is inconvenient enough to warrant an exemption (especially since another, highly motivated teen might attend school under similar circumstances).[12] Medical exemptions that are not accompanied by a physician's statement also fall into this category.

B. Prevalence of Exemptions

Exemptions are heavily used in some welfare-to-work programs. For example, in California's Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) program, more than one-third of all clients were deferred (the equivalent of being exempted in LEAP) at least once within six months of orientation (see Riccio et al., 1989). This is a key reason why participation rates in these programs are often lower than expected.

There are reasons to expect that exemption rates would also be relatively high in LEAP, a program that requires low-income teenage parents, a group with many personal and situational problems, to attend school regularly, and enforces this requirement with financial penalties. Some predicted that teens would frequently seek exemptions for lack of child care or other reasons, making it difficult to apply the mandate on a large scale.

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[12] The LEAP regulations describe "excessive distance" as "round-trip travel time in excess of two hours by available public or private transportation. This includes the time necessary to transport children to a child care facility."

In general, interviews with LEAP staff suggest that the overall rate of exemptions is relatively low. Staff also report that the less discretionary exemptions are by far the most common. Specifically, during the first year of operations, staff in all counties said that the exemption for teens with young children was granted most often. With the addition of the pregnancy exemption in September 1990, this reason quickly became prominent, and the overall rate of exemptions increased somewhat.

The prevalence of discretionary exemptions varies somewhat by county and type of exemption. However, overall, it appears that these exemptions are quite rare. Child care exemptions are granted with some regularity in several counties, but they tend to be short-term, perhaps because demand for program-funded care has been low and existing supply networks have not been seriously strained in most areas (see Chapter 6). Only Cuyahoga County has reported substantial numbers of lengthy exemptions for lack of child care. Staff report that none of the other discretionary reasons occur frequently. It is difficult to determine whether this is primarily because teens do not request exemptions or because staff are reluctant to grant them. If the latter is true, and teens do, in fact, have legitimate barriers to attendance, low rates of exemptions may simply produce higher rates of noncompliance and sanctioning.

Thus, early evidence on exemptions suggests that it is feasible to impose a school attendance requirement on most teenage parents. Despite a fairly extensive set of potential reasons, the overall rate of exemptions appears to be relatively low, and most of the exemptions that have been granted are for reasons that are more related to state policy decisions than to the LEAP program's capacity to provide needed support services or to barriers that prevent teens from attending school. More detailed data about exemptions will be presented in the interim report in this evaluation.

C. Pregnancy Exemption

The issue of the mandatory status of pregnant teens has been a source of controversy since before LEAP was implemented. In the February 1989 LEAP concept paper, pregnancy was included among the exemption reasons. However, it was removed during the period preceding implementation. During the first year of operations, pregnant teens could be exempted for medical reasons (such as problem pregnancies), but not simply because they were pregnant.

The September 1990 program revisions expanded LEAP eligibility to teens who are pregnant with their first child, but also added an exemption for pregnant teens during the last month of the first trimester and the last two trimesters of the pregnancy. This exemption applies not only to first pregnancies but also to subsequent pregnancies, although exempt teens are permitted to volunteer for the program.[13] This change was judged necessary in order to bring LEAP into compliance with federal JOBS exemption criteria.

Many LEAP staff have expressed concern about the pregnancy exemption, particularly for parenting teens already in the LEAP program who experience a second or third pregnancy. Staff contend that exempting teens from program requirements when they become pregnant sends an inappropriate signal to teens and may even encourage repeat pregnancies. They also point out that a pregnancy exemption, when combined with the three-month exemption after the child is born, can interrupt a teen's participation for an entire school year. Staff contend that it can be considerably more difficult to persuade a teen to return to school after a lengthy break in attendance.

Perhaps the most strenuous objections to the new policy have come from school staff, notably GRADS teachers, who feel that the pregnancy exemption sends the wrong message to teens. They also note that the new rule is inconsistent with school policies (pregnancy is not considered a valid excuse for missing school). On the other hand, some state policymakers have expressed concern that the participation mandate might be especially problematic for pregnant teens and have such unintended consequences as discouraging prenatal care.

At this point, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions about the implications of the pregnancy exemption. However, it is clear that repeat pregnancies are a serious problem among LEAP teens, and that exemptions have become much more common since September 1990. In MDRC's Wave I survey, approximately 15 percent of the respondents indicated that they were pregnant at the time of the interview. Since all of these teens already have at least one child, and other respondents may have given birth since random assignment (but are not currently pregnant), it is clear that repeat pregnancies are quite prevalent. Although staff report that many teens choose to continue attending school during much of their pregnancies, the pregnancy exemption is obviously relevant in many cases.

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[13] Since many teens do not know for certain that they are pregnant before the end of the first trimester (and do not report it to the Human Services Department if they do know), the brief mandatory period at the beginning of the pregnancy is usually irrelevant. In many cases, clients do not report pregnancies to the department until the sixth month, when they become eligible to receive supplementary cash benefits (although some pregnancies are reported earlier because clients receive prenatal care covered by Medicaid).

IV. Conclusions

Early evidence suggests that, despite some problems, LEAP program staff have implemented the program's financial incentive system and have requested grant adjustments for large numbers of teen parents. Data provided by several counties for a single month suggest that LEAP staff in these areas request bonuses approximately as frequently as they request sanctions. The reported rate of sanction requests appears to be substantially higher than rates found in evaluations of welfare-to-work programs for adults, for a variety of understandable reasons. The LEAP figures appear to be similar to those measured in two other current mandatory programs serving teen parents.

It is too early to determine whether the financial incentive system is having its desired effect on teens' behavior. MDRC's next report will address this question in detail. However, the evidence cited in this chapter suggests several general lessons about implementing a program of this type.

First, a program that requires teenage parents to attend school, monitors attendance carefully, and includes an explicit attendance standard and strictly prescribed rules for adjusting welfare grants can expect a relatively high rate of sanctioning. The rate will be determined by other factors, too, such as the range of education options available to teens. However, including bonuses and support services in the model may help the program maintain public support.

Second, in designing due process procedures for a program like LEAP, administrators face an important trade-off. On the one hand, providing clients with several opportunities to respond before grants are reduced may help to reduce the number of hearings requested and may promote cooperation by education providers. On the other hand, the more opportunities clients have to respond, the greater the time lag between behavior and financial response.

Third, and finally, it appears to be feasible to impose a school attendance requirement on the vast majority of teen parents. Relatively few teens have been exempted from LEAP requirements owing to obstacles such as lack of child care or transportation. However, it is not clear at this point whether this is attributable to a relative lack of legitimate barriers, teens' reluctance to seek exemptions, or staff practices in granting exemptions.

CHAPTER 6

CHILD CARE

A public program that requires the mothers of young children to engage in activities outside the home clearly must address the issue of how the children will be cared for in the mothers' absence. Accordingly, the LEAP regulations state that "if the participant is in need of child care in order to attend school, the CDHS [county department of human services] is responsible for providing for or arranging child care services for the teen custodial parent.... If child care is required and is not available, teen custodial parents shall be exempt from participation."

This chapter discusses the counties' experiences in helping teens to arrange for their children's care, and some of the child care problems they and LEAP clients have encountered during the first 18 months of LEAP operations.

I. Child Care Allocations

Child care is treated as an entitlement for LEAP teens who need it to attend school.[1] ODHS budgeted substantial funds for LEAP child care: $9.1 million during fiscal year 1990. (During the same period, $4.4 million was budgeted for program administration and transportation assistance.)

In determining the child care allocations, program planners assumed that approximately 35 percent of LEAP teens (and nearly 60 percent of those attending school) would use program-funded care.[2] This estimate is higher than child care use patterns that have been observed in other welfare-to-work programs. For example, in California's GAIN program, only 10 percent of mandatory clients who were registered for the program used GAIN child care funds, and only 29 percent of those mandatory clients who actually participated in a GAIN activity within six months of registration did so. (By contrast, 37 percent of GAIN participants used a child care arrangement that was not funded by the program.) During fiscal year 1987-88, only about one-third of the funds allocated for GAIN child care were spent (Martinson and Riccio, 1989).

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[1] At first, child care was treated as a "capped entitlement," since each county received an allocation that was technically limited and was not large enough to fund full-time care for every client. However, this cap was not an issue in practice. Subsequently, the state removed the county allocation limit, and it reimburses all necessary expenditures.

[2] ODHS assumed that 68 percent of the LEAP population would be out of school at program intake. It further estimated that 40 percent of the out-of-school teens would return to school and need day care, and that 25 percent of those in school would begin to receive LEAP day care.

LEAP program planners believed that rates of child care use would be higher among LEAP clients than among participants in programs such as GAIN, primarily because nearly all LEAP clients would have a preschool-age child. In most welfare-to-work programs prior to JOBS (such as GAIN prior to 1989), clients with preschool-age children were not required to participate in out-of-home activities.[3] Thus, for example, during the school year, the children of more than one-half of mandatory GAIN participants were in school during the hours their parent was in an activity. Another reason for assuming that child care use would be higher in LEAP than in programs such as GAIN is that the LEAP requirement calls for clients to be in an ongoing education activity, which in most cases involves a continuous commitment of time for many hours each week – unlike the job-seeking activities typically used in welfare-to-work programs. Finally, it was assumed that participation rates would be fairly high in LEAP relative to programs such as GAIN – in part because a fairly high proportion of LEAP clients would be young people who had not dropped out of school. Thus, ODHS and the counties were expecting a fairly high demand for state-funded child care among those teen parents complying with the LEAP requirements.

II. Child Care Supply and Demand in LEAP

Although definitive information regarding state child care expenditures for LEAP is not available, preliminary evidence suggests that the use of LEAP-funded child care is substantially lower than planners had anticipated. LEAP staff in every county reported that relatively few clients have used a program-supported arrangement. Also, early responses from MDRC's Wave I survey indicate that only about 14 percent of the teens in the LEAP treatment group who reported being currently enrolled in school said that they were using a child care arrangement paid for by the welfare department. (Approximately the same percentage of in-school control group teens reported using a child care arrangement paid for by the welfare department.)[4] The lower-than-anticipated use of funded child care in LEAP appears to reflect a combination of relatively low demand and problems of child care supply.

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[3] Under the JOBS program, mandatory participation has been extended to clients whose youngest child is three to five years old (or one to five years old, at the state's option).

A. Demand for Program-Funded Child Care

Discussions with county staff have suggested two primary explanations for the low "demand" for LEAP-sponsored child care:

- **Teens' preferences.** LEAP staff in every county have indicated that many teens (and, in some cases, other family members as well) are extremely reluctant to entrust the care of their children to strangers. Resistance to using non-family care has also been observed in other programs for teen parents. The concerns of these young mothers stem in part from media reports regarding abuse and neglect in child care facilities, but also appear to reflect a more deep-seated distrust of strangers that may not be inappropriate in low-income neighborhoods where crime rates and drug use are high (Polit, Kisker, and Cohen, 1989; Kisker, Silverberg, and Maynard, 1990). The recent MDRC survey found that 77 percent of LEAP teens who were using child care while they attended school relied on relatives, and the vast majority of these teens expressed satisfaction with their arrangements.

- **State rules.** The State of Ohio has fairly strict rules governing the use of public funds for child care. Specifically, these funds may be used only to support care provided in licensed day care centers or certified family day care homes.[5] People who wish to become certified home providers (and thus be permitted to care for up to six children, no more than three of whom may be under two years old) must go through home inspections, a background check, and a training course. Since the teens' family members are rarely certified providers, the state certification rule, coupled with the teens' preference for relative care, greatly reduces LEAP clients' demand for funded child care.

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[4] In a recent survey of teenage mothers participating in the Teenage Parent Demonstration programs, it was found that, four months after enrollment, about 14 percent of all teens (28 percent of the teens who were employed or in school/training) received assistance in paying for a child care arrangement through the welfare agency or demonstration program. However, the survey suggests that the use of funded care was substantially greater among program participants than among a control group of teenage mothers, fewer than 5 percent of whom obtained assistance from the welfare agency in paying for child care (Kisker, Silverberg, and Maynard, 1990). It is important to note, however, that a direct comparison of child care rates in the Teenage Parent Demonstration and LEAP cannot yet be made because the LEAP survey asked about current child care for teens at varying points after intake, while the Teenage Parent Demonstration report discusses rates at a fixed point (four months) after intake.

[5] In several welfare programs (such as California's GAIN and programs in the Teenage Parent Demonstration), both licensed and unlicensed providers, including relatives and friends of the participant, are eligible to receive program-funded payments for child care.

B. Supply of Child Care for LEAP Participants

When LEAP was implemented, most counties already had contracts with local child care centers and family day care homes through the federal-state Title XX (Social Services Block Grant) program, which is generally available to low-income parents. These same providers formed the core of the day care network for both LEAP and JOBS, although new contracts had to be negotiated.[6] In most counties, these networks appear to be sufficient, and serious supply problems do not seem to be common – in part because demand has been low. Nevertheless, LEAP staff in some counties report that there are shortages of child care slots, and that some LEAP teens who request child care cannot obtain it. In discussions with LEAP staff, several issues relating to the supply of child care emerged:

- **Overall supply.** In some counties, the overall supply of contracted child care slots does not meet demand. For example, owing to complex legal problems, Stark County does not currently contract with any family day care homes, and available slots in child care centers fill quickly. In other areas, child care slots may exist, but staff report that the maximum hourly rates the agency can pay are too low to open these slots to LEAP clients.[7] Finally, as the JOBS program (which is much larger than LEAP) becomes fully operational, the combined demand from all county welfare programs may put increasing strain on the existing network of providers.[8]

- **Infant care.** The supply of child care for infants is generally low throughout the state. Many certified or licensed providers do not accept infants, even though the reimbursement rate is highest for these children. Since most LEAP teens have very young children, this can limit the number of slots available to these clients, even if the overall number of slots is sufficient. The low availability of infant care is a prevalent situation throughout the country.

- **Accessible supply.** Access problems have also limited the use of funded care. Contracted child care slots are scarce in certain neighborhoods or areas of counties, and it is sometimes not feasible for teens to use child care that is not located near their home or school. This problem seems to be prevalent in both urban and rural areas, and is especially serious when public transportation is limited or nonexistent. Even in large cities with extensive mass transit systems, taking buses from home to a cross-city child care provider and then to school may be totally unmanageable. If child care slots are inaccessible to the teens, the effective number of available slots is decreased.

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[6] Counties negotiate contracts with local centers and family day care homes for the LEAP, JOBS, and Title XX programs. Payment is provided according to hourly rates set by the state, based on periodic surveys. These rates, which may differ for each program, vary depending on the age of the child.

[7] Some counties choose not to pay providers the maximum hourly rates allowable under LEAP rules. In some cases, this is because the Title XX reimbursement rates, which are already paid to some providers, are lower than the LEAP rates, and counties do not want to pay some providers more than others for the same service.

[8] One additional possibility is that, as JOBS becomes fully implemented, fewer of the LEAP clients' relatives will be available for child care if they are required to participate in JOBS activities.

- **School-based child care.** One of the most popular child care arrangements among teenage parents – on-site care provided in schools – is seldom available. There are child care facilities in a few schools, especially in alternative school programs (for example, in Cleveland, Akron, Toledo, and Dayton). However, child care is rarely available in comprehensive high schools, and slots in all on-site facilities tend to fill quickly.

- **Part-time and evening slots.** Teens who elect to attend ABE/GED programs often face additional problems. These programs generally meet for 10 hours a week or less, and part-time slots typically are not attractive to child care providers. Moreover, many ABE/GED classes are scheduled for evening hours when child care is often unavailable. (Of course, because ABE/GED programs meet for many fewer hours than high school programs, informal child care may be somewhat easier to arrange.)

- **Erratic attendance.** County staff report that some family day care providers are hesitant about accepting the children of teenage parents. This is because providers believe that teens are likely to have erratic school attendance, which will cause their children to be absent from child care more often than the children of working parents. This is financially troublesome for providers, since they are reimbursed only for days when the child comes to day care.

In summary, while the demand for funded child care has been relatively low, LEAP has not always been able to meet the needs of teens who have requested assistance with child care.

III. Patterns of Child Care Experiences in LEAP

As discussed in Chapter 2, child care assistance is usually handled by a specialized unit in the social services division of the county agency. Teens are informed about the availability of program-funded care by LEAP case managers during assessment interviews, and those who request assistance are referred to the child care unit.[9] Depending on the location of LEAP and the overall size of the agency, this referral may involve relatively complex intra-agency communications. For example, in Cuyahoga County, the day care unit is located several miles from the LEAP office. In other counties, the linkage between LEAP and day care is more direct.

Regardless of the complexity of the linkage, several distinct patterns that characterize the teens' child care experiences have been observed by LEAP staff. At assessment, many teens tell their case managers that they do not need child care from LEAP. In most cases, these teens are already in school and have an established arrangement with a relative, or are expecting to use relative care when they return. LEAP staff are generally willing to accept whatever arrangement the teen prefers, at least on a trial basis. However, if the teen elects to use an informal provider and child care problems begin to result in poor school attendance, the case manager may urge the teen to consider a funded arrangement.

For those teens who say they do need assistance with child care, LEAP staff refer them to the day care unit of the agency (except in those counties where LEAP staff handle this function). However, these teens often do not follow up on these referrals – a situation that is especially likely to occur once the teens learn that relatives cannot be paid with LEAP funds. (As discussed in Chapter 2, staff in several of the larger counties, in particular, have reported that LEAP teens often "fall through the cracks" when they are referred to the day care unit, in part because of poor intra-agency linkages.) Many of these teens who fail to follow through with the LEAP referrals eventually establish an informal arrangement with a relative.

Yet another group of teens go on to discuss their child care needs with staff in the day care unit and obtain a referral to a provider that is accessible and acceptable to them. Since they do not have relative care available to them (or relative care is otherwise unacceptable), it is presumably these teens whose ability to comply with the LEAP requirements is most strongly dependent on the availability of program-sponsored care.

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[9] In other programs where rates of program-funded child care utilization are low, some observers have suggested that clients were not adequately informed about the availability of this service. This does not appear to be the case in LEAP. Although they do not always "sell" program-funded child care to teens who seem satisfied with an informal arrangement, case managers discussed the availability of this service in all assessment interviews observed by MDRC staff. In addition, the standard LEAP agreement signed by teens during assessment includes a section where teens must initial one of a set of statements describing their child care arrangement.

A final group of teens includes those whose need for child care cannot be addressed by the program. Some of these teens do not have relative care, but are unwilling, without considerable persuasion, to use a provider who is unknown to them. In other cases, teens meet with day care staff and receive lists of available slots, but elect not to use any of them. Sometimes this is because available slots are not convenient to their home or school. At this point, if the teen does not make an informal arrangement and does not attend school, staff need to determine whether the available child care is sufficiently inconvenient to warrant exempting the teen from LEAP requirements. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, only a small minority of teens have been exempted from LEAP owing to lack of child care, and most of these exemptions have been short term.

IV. County Strategies to Deal with Child Care Issues

Some counties have taken steps to intervene in the child care arrangements of LEAP clients, including making efforts to increase the number of teens using program-funded child care. At the simplest level, many LEAP case managers and day care workers try to ease teens' fears about using licensed or certified providers by explaining that these providers are inspected, trained, and monitored by agency staff. They also explain to the teens how to evaluate a potential provider. (In Hamilton County, day care staff prepared an entertaining cassette tape that provides advice on how to choose a provider.) In some cases, case managers go with teens to visit family day care homes, which often are less acceptable to the teens than child care centers.

In some counties, teens are encouraged to find a child care provider with whom they are comfortable and to inform that person that she or he may become a certified provider. However, several factors limit the likelihood that this will occur. First, federal rules prohibit the agency from paying a provider to care for a child who is on his or her own AFDC grant, even if the provider is certified. This means that one of the most common informal arrangements – care provided by a teen's mother who is the head of the AFDC case – cannot be paid for with program funds. In such situations, there is little incentive to pursue certification. Second, a portion of the payment received by certified providers who are AFDC recipients may be counted as income against the welfare grant, and this may also discourage relatives on a separate AFDC grant from seeking certification. Third, non-AFDC recipients may be hesitant to become providers unless the agency can guarantee that they will always be able to fill the maximum allowable slots (six). Without such a guarantee – which the agency cannot make – the low reimbursement offered by counties may not make it worthwhile to start a child care business. Fourth, relatives may not want to become certified as child care providers because they do not want to be required to care for children outside their families. These people are often willing to care for a child out of commitment to the family, but have no interest in "making a business" of it. Finally, some potential providers claim that the certification process is too burdensome to make becoming a provider worthwhile.

Several counties have devised general strategies to increase the number of family day care providers available for all agency programs. For example, Montgomery County, using special ODHS funding, recently initiated a program to train AFDC recipients to be family day care providers. Lorain County is planning a similar effort. Summit and Montgomery counties have applied for special funding through a state-sponsored child care demonstration effort designed to develop and test more flexible strategies of child care assistance. These grants would allow the counties to pay providers chosen by clients (even if they are not certified or licensed) as long as they meet basic health and safety standards. Trumbull County received a grant from ODHS to market its day care program and recruit more family day care homes.

Staff in some counties expressed an interest in promoting the development of on-site school-based child care, an arrangement that is especially attractive to teen parents required to attend school. However, one of the key obstacles to increasing the supply of school-based care is the up-front expense involved in bringing these facilities up to the licensing standards.[10] LEAP funds can be used to support direct provision of care, but not for capital outlays.

V. Implications of Child Care Patterns Within LEAP

In the first 18 months of operating LEAP, almost every county shared two similar experiences: (1) The number of teens relying on child care paid for with LEAP funds was quite low, and (2) the number of exemptions granted to teens because of their inability to arrange suitable child care was also low. In light of the fact that LEAP clients are all young parents with preschool-age children, and that the program requires ongoing attendance in an education program, these experiences may seem counterintuitive. It might be noted, however, that many welfare programs (such as GAIN and programs in the Teenage Parent Demonstration) have similarly budgeted more for child care than they have actually spent.

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[10] In many school districts, there are school-based child care centers built to serve students learning child care skills in vocational training programs. Most of these facilities initially served children ages 3 to 5, rather than infants or toddlers, and they received little funding from Title XX or other human services sources. However, over the past several years, some schools have expanded their centers to serve infants in order to provide child care for teen parents in coordination with GRADS. Often, these centers needed major renovation to meet building codes, which include special provisions for facilities serving infants. The availability of LEAP child care funds, beginning in 1989, provided an incentive for school-based centers to become licensed under ODHS regulations (which obliges them to meet building code requirements) and may have stimulated additional renovation projects.

The implications of this situation for program planning and the success of LEAP are not at all clear. The child care issue is a controversial one, with strong advocates taking opposing positions regarding the state's role in paying for child care and in promoting particular types of arrangements. Three issues appear to be of particular importance: (1) the costs associated with funded care, (2) the effects of informal child care on the teen parents' ability to comply with program requirements, and (3) the effects of informal types of child care on the health and development of the young children.

A. Implications Relating to Costs

From a purely financial perspective, the current LEAP child care situation is auspicious. The program expenditures for child care have been relatively low, and the experience to date suggests that the low demand for funded child care has not created noteworthy operational problems: The program has been implemented without undue resistance and with relatively few exemptions for child care. In fact, a different scenario might well have resulted in severe operational problems. For example, if the majority of LEAP clients needed a paid arrangement in order to comply with school attendance requirements, LEAP program costs would be astronomical (assuming that child care supply could match demand). Indeed, it might be argued on financial grounds that LEAP staff should encourage clients to use unpaid relative care whenever possible to reserve child care resources for those teens for whom relative care is not a viable option.[11] However, child care use patterns have implications beyond financial ones that need to be taken into consideration.

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[11] This is the approach that has been adopted in the Chicago program (Project Advance) of the Teenage Parent Demonstration (Hershey and Nagatoshi, 1989).

B. Implications Relating to LEAP Clients' Behavior

There are discrepant views regarding the extent to which predominant reliance on relative care has affected teens' ability to successfully participate in LEAP. On the one hand, GRADS teachers and others report that "child care problems" are the most frequent cause of poor attendance for teenage parents. And, in fact, evidence from MDRC's Wave I survey supports the view that child care problems are related to teen absences. According to the teens' self-reports, about one-third of the teens who were enrolled in school at the time of the survey said they had missed one or more days of school during the previous month because of a child care problem. Those who are critical of the current situation often contend that child care providers who are paid are more reliable than informal providers who may not be available every day. According to many of these observers, the Ohio rules restricting payment to certified or licensed providers indirectly cause teens to miss school by reducing the number of situations in which providers can be reimbursed.[12]

On the other hand, LEAP staff report that teens who want to go to school are generally able to "work something out" without assistance, while those who do not want to attend school often use "child care problems" as an excuse to stay home. Further, there is not a consensus that teens using informal care miss more school owing to child care problems than do those using formal, program-funded arrangements. Some LEAP staff have pointed out that teens using program-funded care may actually miss more school because formal providers, unlike relatives, generally do not accept sick children. Moreover, the accessibility of most informal arrangements (often in the teens' own home) may reduce absences resulting from transportation problems and the complex logistics of getting two people ready for the day ahead (that is, the teen for school and the baby for child care).

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[12] In many school districts, the GRADS program has a small grant (funded through the federal Carl Perkins Act) that can be used to support child care for low-income GRADS students. These funds can be paid to almost any provider, including those who are uncertified, and were available prior to the implementation of LEAP. Some GRADS teachers maintain that providing these funds gives them leverage to insist that child care providers – often the student's mother – be available every day. Since LEAP funds are now available to provide child care to GRADS students who are eligible for LEAP, GRADS child care money is generally reserved for students who do not qualify for LEAP or other welfare department programs (for example, students with low-income working parents). Since LEAP students are eligible for CDHS child care, even though they may choose not to use it, GRADS funds are not generally being used to pay for the informal arrangements they prefer.

C. Implications for the Teens' Children

There are also strong differences of opinion regarding the effects of relative care on the well-being of the teens' children. Some child advocates maintain that formal arrangements are both safer and more likely to offer a stimulating developmental environment for children than informal relative care. These advocates support the Ohio restrictions regarding child care payments. They argue that state funds should be used only to support providers who are trained, inspected, and monitored by public agencies. (Others, however, argue that the rules are unreasonably rigid and that their primary effect is to reduce the number of situations for which low-income parents can obtain public support for their preferred child care arrangement.)

Those who believe that relative care might be preferable to program-funded care for many teens argue that relatives (who are usually the grandmothers) are especially likely to be warm and nurturing to the children. Moreover, relatives are more likely to offer the children greater continuity of care than would be possible in day care centers or family day care homes. Many LEAP staff say that grandmothers are often excellent caretakers, who provide support to the teens in both their parent and student roles.

The effect of child care on infant development is an issue about which even child development experts disagree, and this controversy is unlikely to be resolved on the basis of any evidence that will be available in LEAP. Any changes in policy or practices regarding LEAP child care are more likely to reflect inferences regarding the effects of child care patterns on expenditures or on teens' behavior.

VI. Conclusions

Although LEAP clients have a manifest need for reliable child care in order to comply with program requirements, only a minority of them are using program-funded child care. Moreover, few teens have been granted an exemption because of an inability to arrange for their children's care. The teens are most likely to rely on informal child care arrangements, usually with their own mothers, while they are attending a school program.

It is difficult to draw any firm conclusions at this point regarding the consequences of low use of funded care by LEAP clients. The majority of LEAP teens are able to rely upon unpaid relative care and many have been able to comply with LEAP requirements. At least some of those who do not have access to such care have been able to secure an acceptable arrangement through the program. It is not clear what proportion of teens fall in between these two situations – that is, those who cannot easily rely on relative care but are unable (because of supply constraints) or unwilling (because of distrust of strangers or their own preferences) to use an alternative arrangement. However, the low number of child care exemptions suggests that the proportion is not large, and the short periods of most exemptions suggest that the situations are usually temporary.

Whatever the proportion is, counties have been working to reduce it, through efforts to expand both supply (by making more slots open to LEAP clients) and demand (by influencing the teens' perceptions about non-relative care). Given the teens' strong preferences for using providers who are known to them (or who can be easily monitored by them, as is the case for on-site school-based care), increasing the supply of child care providers alone is unlikely to have a dramatic effect on patterns of child care use among LEAP clients.

APPENDIX A

TABLE A.1

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OHIO LEAP RESEARCH SAMPLE, BY COUNTY

	County												
Characteristic	Cuyahoga	Franklin	Hamilton	Jefferson	Lawrence	Lorain	Lucas	Montgomery	Muskingum	Stark	Summit	Trumbull	Total
Average Age (Years)	17.6	17.5	17.6	17.5	17.8	17.6	17.5	17.7	17.8	17.7	17.5	17.5	17.6***
Enrolled in School	54.5%	42.9%	50.5%	44.0%	50.0%	50.7%	58.9%	43.0%	63.3%	50.9%	56.9%	49.3%	50.7%***
Not Enrolled in School	45.5%	57.1%	49.5%	56.0%	50.0%	49.3%	41.1%	57.0%	36.7%	49.1%	43.1%	50.7%	49.3%
Average Highest Grade Completed	9.5	9.3	9.4	9.3	9.7	9.5	9.8	9.3	9.9	9.8	9.6	9.6	9.5***
Average Number of Months Since Last Attended School (Non-Enrolled Teens Only)	16.6	18.5	19.5	17.8	20.1	19.3	17.1	18.4	15.5	17.8	16.3	17.1	18.0***
Head of Own AFDC Case	51.5%	49.5%	60.6%	48.0%	46.3%	57.6%	53.5%	62.4%	57.0%	59.3%	69.7%	48.6%	56.1%***
On Parent's AFDC Case	42.9%	44.7%	35.1%	31.0%	23.9%	32.6%	44.4%	32.5%	34.2%	34.3%	27.0%	38.0%	37.8%
On Another AFDC Case	5.7%	5.8%	4.3%	21.0%	29.9%	9.8%	2.1%	5.1%	8.9%	6.4%	3.3%	13.5%	6.1%
Black	81.5%	57.6%	71.1%	23.0%	1.5%	32.7%	64.6%	59.5%	10.1%	36.5%	61.0%	40.9%	61.2%***[a]
White	15.4%	41.3%	28.8%	76.0%	97.1%	50.6%	28.2%	39.2%	89.9%	60.1%	38.2%	59.1%	36.0%
Hispanic	2.4%	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	15.6%	6.7%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%
Single, Never Married	96.1%	92.7%	94.4%	75.0%	41.2%	86.1%	96.3%	91.0%	79.7%	83.9%	94.9%	78.9%	91.6%[b]
Currently Married	2.3%	3.4%	2.7%	23.0%	45.6%	7.8%	2.1%	4.1%	15.2%	9.6%	3.1%	12.0%	4.9%
Divorced, Separated, or Widowed	1.6%	3.9%	2.8%	2.0%	13.2%	6.1%	1.6%	4.9%	5.1%	6.5%	2.0%	9.1%	3.5%
No Children[c]	3.8%	2.7%	1.4%	11.0%	0.0%	17.0%	0.9%	3.2%	8.9%	2.8%	2.4%	7.7%	3.9%***
One Child	81.9%	82.1%	80.5%	78.0%	88.2%	71.8%	79.2%	79.0%	87.3%	85.5%	84.1%	80.9%	81.0%
Two or More Children	14.3%	15.2%	18.1%	11.0%	11.8%	11.2%	19.9%	17.7%	3.8%	11.7%	13.5%	11.5%	15.1%
Average Number of Children	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.2	1.2	0.9	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.1***
Average Age of Youngest Child (Months)	12.4	10.1	11.6	8.9	9.6	9.6	11.2	10.1	10.7	10.4	11.2	8.6	11.0***
Earnings During the Prior 12 Months	11.7%	12.4%	24.7%	23.0%	9.0%	19.9%	16.3%	18.5%	35.1%	17.6%	13.4%	19.1%	17.1%***
No Earnings During the Prior 12 Months	88.3%	87.6%	75.3%	77.0%	91.0%	80.1%	83.7%	81.5%	64.9%	82.4%	86.6%	80.9%	82.9%
Sample Size	1,401	868	1,008	100	68	347	433	591	79	328	459	209	5,891

SOURCE: MDRC Teen Parent Information Data Base.

NOTES: This table includes teens in both the treatment and control groups for whom these data were available by December 1990.

Sample sizes differ in Tables 3.1 and A.1 because of missing data.

A chi-square test or an F-test was applied to differences between counties. Statistical significance levels are indicated as: * = 10 percent; ** = 5 percent; *** = 1 percent.

[a] For the chi-square test, these categories were collapsed into "white" and "nonwhite."

[b] A chi-square test was inappropriate because of low expected cell frequencies.

[c] In September 1990, LEAP eligibility was extended to teens who are pregnant with their first child.

APPENDIX B

THE FLOW OF INFORMATION IN LEAP

In an attempt to save counties from some of the clerical tasks and mailing associated with attendance monitoring, ODHS staff decided to centralize this process using the existing statewide computerized welfare data system (known as CRIS, which stands for Client Registry Information System), rather than having each county handle it locally. County human services agencies have computer terminals through which staff can access CRIS.

As described in Chapter 1, county staff enter data on each teen into a specially designed LEAP tracking segment within CRIS at LEAP assessment. They then update this information whenever a teen's status changes – for example, when a teen who was exempt becomes active again, or when a teen changes schools. One of the key pieces of information is a school code, which identifies the education program the teen is attending (each school in Ohio has a unique code). Each month, ODHS data processing staff in Columbus generate a School Absence Report for each LEAP teen and mail these reports directly to the appropriate schools throughout Ohio. Schools complete the forms and mail them to county human services agencies, which implement the financial incentive system. Data on sanction requests, good cause, and other actions resulting from the attendance information are then entered into the tracking system. Thus, the information that triggers the financial incentives travels each month from counties to the state, from the state to schools, from schools to counties, and then from counties back to the state.[1]

I. System Problems During the First Year of Operations

In theory, the fact that the LEAP attendance monitoring system is built around CRIS both assists counties in implementing the program and provides state staff with up-to-date information to monitor and assess county performance. However, this system has not always functioned as planned. The key problem during the first year of operations was that staff in many counties had difficulty entering background and status data on LEAP teens into the tracking system and, in some cases, were unable to determine whether the system had accepted their entries. This appears to have been caused by a combination of system design problems and incorrect data entry techniques, both of which are likely to result when a new program and a new or revised data system are implemented simultaneously in a brief period.[2]

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[1] It is important to note that welfare payments (including LEAP sanctions and bonuses) are processed separately, through a part of CRIS that is not directly linked to the LEAP tracking system. Thus, entry of attendance data into the tracking system does not automatically trigger a sanction and, conversely, sanctions and bonuses can be processed without updating the tracking information. As discussed in Chapter 3, LEAP teens are identified in the welfare data system by a "target code" ("L").

Because CRIS plays such a vital role in the attendance reporting process, system problems led to program problems. From the county perspective, this meant that schools did not receive School Absence Reports for some LEAP teens (or received them late) and consequently did not know whose attendance to report to the program. This severely hampered the attendance reporting system in some areas and, according to staff reports, also damaged relations between LEAP staff and schools.[3]

Some counties, anxious to operate the program as efficiently as possible, compensated for these problems by devising ways to bypass CRIS. Attendance reporting was handled locally (in some cases, county LEAP staff produced lists of the teens enrolled in each school and sent them directly to schools) and, in some cases, little or no data were entered into the CRIS tracking system. In Cuyahoga County, CDHS staff actually instructed ODHS not to generate School Absence Reports for Cleveland public school programs. Since sanctions and bonuses can be issued without updating the tracking information, counties discovered that it was essentially possible to implement the entire LEAP model without using the CRIS tracking system. This meant that counties had little incentive to keep these data up to date.

In addition, LEAP was affected by other, more general characteristics of CRIS. Most important, owing to its design, the system allows only limited interaction with users. As some county staff have put it, "you can't get out what you put into the system. " Thus, for example, while county staff enter the data that trigger School Absence Reports, they are unable to retrieve this information or generate reports describing which absence reports were mailed to which schools by ODHS.

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[2] When developing an innovative model, program staff, with little or no experience to guide them, are not able to identify in advance exactly which capabilities they will require of the data system. Consequently, systems staff are unable to anticipate all eventualities in their computer programming. In addition, the implementation of a new program often entails a period of "trial and error" characterized by frequent changes in policies and practices. Many of these changes have implications for the data system, but these may not become apparent until after the change is made and users begin to experience problems with the system. Finally, when the data system serves a widely dispersed group of users, it is difficult for systems staff to train all users, communicate with them regularly about problems, and keep them up to date on changes and revisions.

[3] It is important to note that some counties had relatively few problems with the tracking system from the beginning. It is not immediately clear why they had more success.

The state's ability to monitor counties' performance was greatly impeded by the counties' inability to enter data into CRIS. County efforts to bypass the system exacerbated this problem. Thus, during the first year of implementation, state-level reports generated through CRIS often greatly understated the level of LEAP activity in those counties that had the most trouble with the system. For example, a report produced in December showed only 48 cases with LEAP activity in Lucas County. MDRC records show that well over 200 teens had been randomly assigned to the treatment group by that point. Statewide, the report indicated that fewer than half the cases that had been coded "L" by income maintenance staff showed any LEAP activity in the tracking system. This was either because LEAP staff were not working with these teens (perhaps owing to the problems discussed in Chapter 3) or because LEAP activity was occurring but was not being entered into the tracking system. When state officials inquired about these data and were told by county staff that the CRIS reports did not accurately describe their programs, ODHS staff began to request periodic manual program reports from counties. County staff report that responding to these requests can be a time-consuming process.

The CRIS-based attendance reporting system appears to be operating somewhat more smoothly in the second year of program operations.[4] ODHS systems and program staff have taken several steps to solve the problems counties experienced during the early months, and to set up lines of communication to address future problems. These have included sending several all-county memos addressing data entry problems that had been reported, and holding a meeting in Columbus involving staff from several counties and the ODHS systems unit. In addition, as the program policies and procedures began to change less frequently, county staff were able to begin using the system more effectively. At the same time, ODHS has created a strong incentive for counties to use the system correctly by raising the possibility of tying program allocations to the level of activity reported in the CRIS tracking system. The state also plans to circulate data showing discrepancies between the number of cases with LEAP target coding and those showing activity in the tracking system in each county, as well as other useful reports that cannot be produced at the local level.

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[4] However, in several instances, School Absence Reports have been delivered to schools late because of mailroom backups in Columbus. ODHS has recently taken steps to automate the mailing process. State staff report that early experience with this new system has been quite positive.

Given the problems they experienced with the tracking system during the first year of operations, and the system's limited ability to provide them with management information, some county LEAP staff have concluded that attendance reporting should have been handled locally from the beginning. However, staff in counties that have experienced relatively few problems with the system feel that it has saved them valuable time.

II. Local Data Systems

Between start-up problems and the inherent limitations of CRIS, LEAP staff, especially in the largest counties, quickly concluded that local management information systems (MIS) would be essential to operating the program. Specifically, in order to make resource allocation decisions, managers needed aggregate information that is not available in the casefiles of individual workers, and cannot be obtained from CRIS.

Cuyahoga County has both the largest LEAP caseload and the most sophisticated local MIS. The LEAP unit has access to a personal computer, and staff have designed a data base exclusively for LEAP; the data base is heavily used. The system includes background information about all teens, as well as up-to-date and historical data on school enrollment, attendance, bonus and sanction requests, and other issues. Thus, for example, LEAP managers can print lists of all teens enrolled in particular schools when it comes time to collect attendance information. For the special Cleveland research project (see Chapter 1), staff can print lists of teens who have various levels of compliance problems (for example, those with three consecutive months of sanctions or those who were assessed but never enrolled in school) so that these teens can be referred to an outside agency for special services.

Cuyahoga and Hamilton county LEAP staff have also benefited from the fact that these counties have departmental computer systems that are similar to, but not directly linked to, CRIS (data are regularly uploaded from the local systems into CRIS). This means that LEAP managers are able to "intercept" certain data at the local level that would otherwise be inaccessible because of CRIS's limited interactive capability.

Franklin County has a highly organized manual MIS that provides weekly aggregate information on referrals, assessments, client demographics, the educational status of LEAP teens, case manager contacts with teens, and other data. Of course, since the data are not computerized, they are more difficult to manipulate.

Most of the smaller counties have also developed rudimentary manual MIS capability. However, for these counties, most of which have only a few LEAP case managers, this is not nearly as critical, and computerized systems are generally not necessary.

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